

ALFRED

JUNE 50¢ K

HITCHCOCK'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



NEW stories
presented by the master of **SUSPENSE**

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June 1968

Dear Reader:

Once again the longest day of the year approaches, and it occurs to me that you may well remember a protracted one within the realm of your personal experience. Some of them are mentioned in the press, some are not, and it leads me to a dilemma of which modesty has inhibited disclosure.

It involves my feelings about the seemingly inexplicable mysteries that surround our daily lives. Most of you are at your leisure as you peruse this magazine, but in my zeal to please all, I have never forgotten those who enjoy reading while they work.

Consequently, I am a trifle concerned about the real reason behind an overshot runway, a grounded freighter, an insecure embassy, a misplaced nuclear bomb . . .

Perhaps in my efforts to provide captivating reading, I have gone too far with suspense. Perhaps it keeps occupied those who should be engaged in *other* vital pursuits.

Nevertheless, it is only a theory, so I shall continue to offer the best in the mystery field monthly. Skeptics may serve warning by checking an appropriate box on Page 160 or the inside back cover, and thus let me know you are watching.

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ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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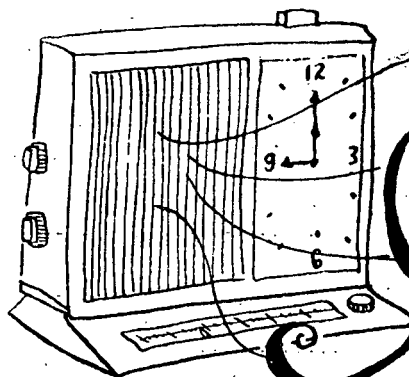
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ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 13, No. 6, June 1968. Single copies 50 cents. Subscriptions \$6.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere \$7.00 (in U.S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by H. S. D. Publications, Inc., 2441 Beach Court, Riviera Beach, Fla. 33404. Publications office, 10 Ferry Street, Concord, N. H. 03302. Second class postage paid at Concord, N. H. Copyright H. S. D. Publications, Inc., 1968. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International and Pan-American copyright convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts if return is desired but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited material. Manuscripts and changes of addresses should be sent to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 2441 Beach Court, Riviera Beach, Fla. 33404. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the U.S.A.

One may perceive why a solution takes time, for the last piece of evidence oftentimes is the most enlightening.

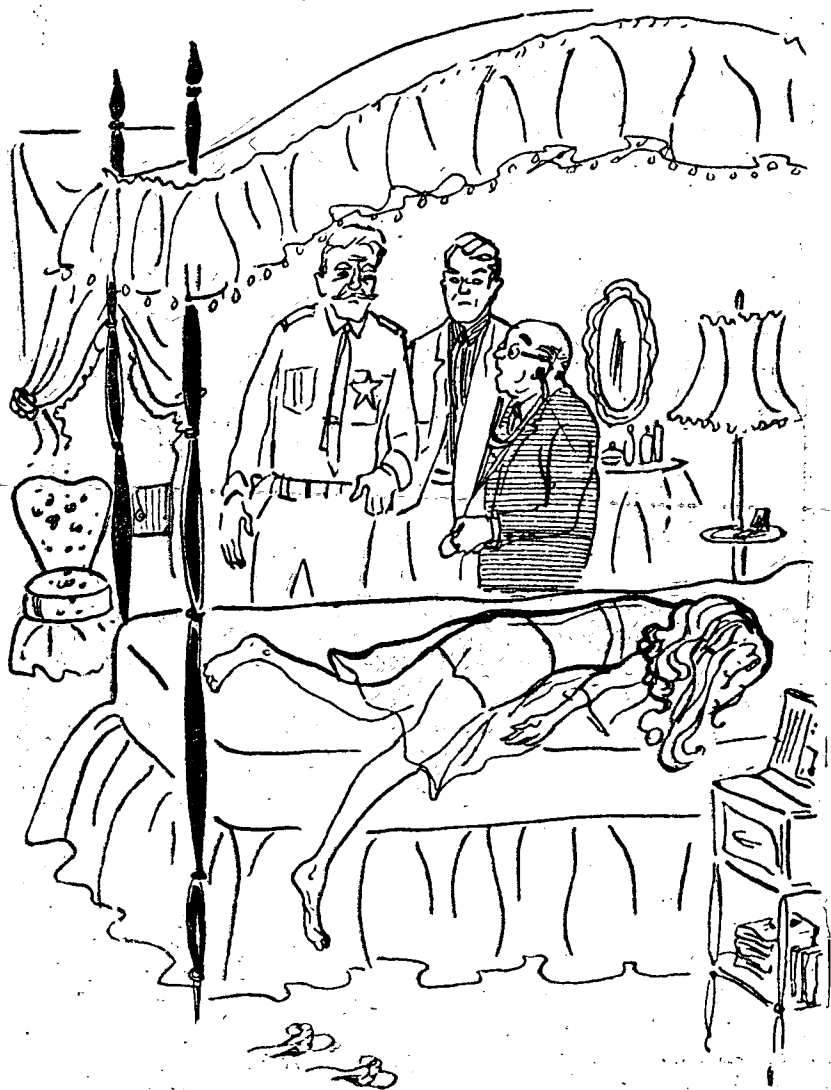


ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

WANDA DEAN FARRIS was lying across the bed in her room, in the small house she shared with her older sister. The only light in the frilly, feminine bedroom came from a floor lamp near the bed. It cast a golden glow over the girl, who lay face down, arms at her sides. She wore only underclothing and a faded blue robe of some flimsy material. A clock-radio on a nightstand beside the bed showed the time as five minutes until eleven. A murmur of dance music flowed from the radio. All in all, it was a homey scene—except that Wanda Farris was dead.

“Stabbed in the back—just once, but that was plenty,” Dr. Johnson said, turning from his examination of the body. “Can’t hardly see the wound, and there’s no external bleeding to speak of. I’d say it was done with an ice pick or somethin’ very similar.”

E. L. Elijah
Ellis



"Anything else—bruises, that kind of thing?" Sheriff Ed Carson asked. He and I were standing just inside the door that connected the bedroom to a hallway.

"Nope," the bulky doctor said. "Far as I can tell, she wasn't molested."

I started to say that being stabbed in the back would seem to be molestation enough, but changed it to, "How long's she been dead, Doc?"

"When was the body found?" Dr. Johnson countered.

Ed Carson eyed the clock-radio on the nightstand. "'Bout fifty minutes ago. The sister—what's her name, Lon?"

"Ellen. Ellen Dean," I said.

"Yes. This Miss Dean got home shortly after ten. She discovered the body right away, and let out a yell that brought the next-door neighbors runnin' over, and they called my office right around ten-fifteen."

Dr. Johnson grunted. "Then the girl's been dead at least one hour. No, you fellas don't give me that go-to-hell look. Hot as it is in here, her present body temperature don't mean much. One hour—maybe three or four."

There was no arguing about the heat. The night outside was hot enough, and in the bedroom, with the windows down and the shades

drawn, it was stifling. There was an air-conditioner in one of the windows, but it was not turned on. Carson, the Doc, and myself—Lon Gates, Pokochobee County attorney—were sweating like field-hands as we stood looking down at the still figure on the bed.

"I'll be able to tell you more after the autopsy," Doc Johnson said, "about the time of death, and so on."

The sheriff stirred. "I reckon you can take her on to the morgue now. My deputy got pictures while he was waitin' for you to get here."

With a nod of his bald head, the doctor waddled out of the room. For a moment longer Carson and I stayed where we were. I asked, "How do you see it?"

"Same as you do, I guess," Carson sighed. "From the setup in the livingroom, it appears she was entertainin' someone. A man. And for some reason the man decided to end the party with an ice pick or whatever . . ."

I agreed. We had arrived at the little house just beyond the outskirts of town about half an hour before. Almost the first thing we noticed when we came inside were pretty obvious signs that an intimate tete-a-tete had been going on. Two glasses and a bottle of bourbon were on a coffee table in the livingroom, plus an ashtray crowd-

ed with cigarette butts. A pair of nylon stockings was draped carelessly over the arm of a sofa, and a brown knit necktie—a man's necktie—lay in a crumpled ball on the floor between the sofa and the coffee table.

Now, standing in the stifling hot bedroom, I shuddered. I said, "The guy must've come here tonight planning to kill her. It's much too neat and clean to have been any sudden crime of passion, or whatever you want to call it. All the time he was playing around with the girl, in the front room, he must have been just waiting for the right moment..."

Carson grimaced. "Yeah, Well. Let's go see if the sister has calmed down enough to talk to us."

As we went along the short hallway, I could hear the radio playing softly behind us. The tune was something about, *All our yesterdays make today*, set to a swinging beat.

In the livingroom we found the sheriff's two deputies, Mullins and Avery, crouched over the coffee table that was set in front of the slightly shabby, overstuffed sofa.

Jack Avery was examining a quart whisky bottle with a magnifying glass. Now he shook his head and muttered, "Wiped clean as a whistle. Just like that one glass."

"Find anything new?" Carson asked.

"Nary a thing," Buck Mullins rumbled, straightening his huge body. "I looked around the house while Jack's been checkin' in here. Didn't find no sign of a door or window havin' been forced open." The big deputy winked and added, "Course, I didn't expect to."

Avery also got to his feet. "I found fingerprints all over the place—exceptin' on this here bottle and one of the two glasses. They've been wiped clean. Other glass has the dead gal's prints on it."

I glanced around the room, spotted the knit necktie lying on the seat of an easy chair, along with Jack Avery's fingerprint kit and flash camera. I went over and picked up the tie. Probably half the men in Pokochobee County owned one just like it—I did myself. It would take at least the FBI to trace it.

Avery was saying, "Most all the prints in here are from one or t'other of two sets—the two women livin' here, I figure. The strays could be anybody's."

Carson had crossed the room to stand in front of an air-conditioner that whirred in a side window. After the heat in the bedroom, it was almost cold in here.

Now Dr. Johnson came in from

the front porch, herding along two sweating ambulance attendants with a long wicker basket between them. After directing his minions toward the hall that led to the dead girl's bedroom, the doctor turned to me with a thoughtful frown on his jowly face.

"Lon, I just remembered somethin' about Wanda Farris. I saw her out at the county hospital just this mornin'. I don't suppose it means anything—"

"What was she doin' out there?" the sheriff asked, coming over to join us.

Dr. Johnson shrugged. "I don't know. I can find out."

"Wish you would," Carson said.

"Okay, I'll check on it directly,"

Doc said, and tramped away toward the bedroom.

After giving his deputies some instructions, Carson and I headed for a closed door in the living-room's back wall. We passed through into a combination kitchen and dining room. Two women, Ellen Dean and a plump, middle-aged woman I didn't know, were sitting at the table. A small banty-cock of a man with a gray fringe around a bald dome stood by the back door.

The man came toward us. He snapped, "It's about time. What's the idea, makin' us stay back here like servants?"

"I'm sorry," Carson said shortly. "You're . . .?"

"George Hartley, of course," the banty-cock said. "I talked to you on the phone awhile ago. This here's my wife, Madge. Me and her run over here soon's we heard Ellen—"

"Settle down, George," the plump woman at the table said. Her husband snorted, but shut up.

I had been looking at Ellen Dean. When we had tried to question her earlier, she had been near hysteria, not capable of coherent speech or much of anything else. She appeared calm enough now. Maybe too calm. Her eyes were red-rimmed and puffy, and her lips pressed into a thin, bloodless line. She wasn't a particularly pretty woman to start with, and right now she looked worse.

Carson said, "Miss Dean, what happened here tonight?"

Before she could answer, George Hartley cried, "That ain't any mystery. Wanda had one of her boyfriends in here, and he up and killed her."

"What boyfriend?" I asked.

"Anyone of a dozen, from what I hear. Why don't you—"

"George, that's enough," his wife said angrily.

Ellen Dean said, "It's all right, Madge. It's no secret that Wanda was—Wanda."



"Do you know who was here with her tonight?" I asked.

She shook her head slowly. "No, I don't, Lon."

She gave me a wan smile that seemed to say it had been a long time since she and I were in the same high school class. For that matter, it had been; twenty years.

She went on in a thin, strained voice. "I did know that Wanda had a date. She acted very—excited—about it. But she didn't say who the date was with. Only that she planned to go out for the evening, and that—"

"Heck, she didn't go out," Hartley broke in. "Or if she did, it

wasn't for long. Me and Madge seen her at nine o'clock, right here in this house."

"That isn't true, George," his wife said, glaring at him. "We don't know who it was."

"Hah! Light goes on in a woman's bedroom, you can be fairly sure she's there."

The sheriff held up a palm. "Just a minute. Exactly what did you see?"

"Me and Madge was out on our patio," Hartley said. "We set out there ever night when it's so hot. Have a TV and all. The patio's just the other side of the hedge from the back of Ellen's house here. Right at nine o'clock, we seen the lights go on in Wanda's bedroom."

"Did you actually see her, or anyone else?" I asked.

Hartley said reluctantly, "Well, no. The shades was all down. But I'm sure I heard voices, one of 'em a man's; laughin' and carryin' on."

"We had the TV on," his wife said wearily. "Did see the light go on, but we didn't hear a thing. Couldn't have, as loud as George plays that TV set."

"Anything else you saw?"

"No, Sheriff. Not a thing all evenin'. Except, of course, when Ellen drove in from work a little after ten."

"Thank you," Carson said. He

went back to Ellen Dean. "Now, what time did you last see your sister alive?"

Ellen winced, but said steadily, "Around six-thirty. I work from seven until ten on Friday and Saturday evenings at a supermarket downtown. My regular job is with Tarrent Real Estate—I'm a secretary there. But the extra money comes in handy."

"Specially with a kid sister moochin' off of you," George Hartley muttered. "Never worked a day in her life."

His wife said, "I don't know what's got into you, George, sayin' things like that. Wanda never did anything to you."

I was beginning to get the idea that might be the trouble, from Hartley's point of view.

Ignoring the interruption, Ellen said, "When I got home, you know what I found . . ."

The sheriff nodded his gray-thatched head. He summed up, "You left here around six-thirty for your job, and didn't return till a few minutes after ten. Durin' that time you didn't hear from your sister? No. You're sure Wanda didn't say who she had an engagement with tonight?"

Ellen hesitated. Finally she said, "I didn't ask." For the first time a trace of color came into her thin cheeks. "I—we each had our pri-

vate lives, not much in common."

"Was Wanda dressed when you left?" I asked.

"Of course," Ellen said. Then, "Oh, you mean—no, she wasn't dressed to go out. She was wearing slacks and a blouse."

"Hah! Wore clothes so tight, looked like they'd been painted on," George Hartley said. His close-set eyes gleamed.

I noticed his wife was watching him with a strange, almost startled expression on her plump round face.

"One last thing, Ellen," I said. "I wonder if you can tell us something about Wanda's husband. I understand they were separated, but—"

"Frank Farris?" Ellen said. "I hadn't even thought of him. He moved away, two years ago, when he and Wanda split up. I think he lives over in New Orleans now."

"They weren't divorced?"

Ellen smiled wryly. "Yes, they were. But Wanda liked the sound of Wanda Dean Farris. Had a ring to it, you know. She kept the name but got rid of the husband."

"Was there any great bad feeling about the divorce?"

Ellen frowned thoughtfully. "I don't think so. The main thing was that Frank was several years older than Wanda, and just couldn't—keep up the pace."

For a moment there was an undercurrent of bitterness in her voice. Something stirred briefly in my memory, then was gone before I could get hold of it.

Carson was saying, "You can't tell us anything about your sister's menfriends?"

"No," Ellen said positively. She got up from her chair, a thin, angular woman in her mid-thirties, but looking more like fifty. It wasn't hard to understand why she had never married. I guessed that she'd had precious few chances.

The sheriff glanced at me. I shrugged slightly. He told Ellen, "All right, Miss Dean. Will you be here?"

"I hadn't thought about it," Ellen said. "But yes."

"Nothin' of the kind," Mrs. Hartley said. "You'll stay at our place tonight, at least."

Ellen stared at the kitchen wall a moment, then slowly nodded. "Yes, maybe you're right. Thank you, Madge."

Carson and I said, "Good night," and went back to the livingroom. George Hartley followed us. Closing the kitchen door, the little man looked up at us with a sly grin.

He said softly, "I can give you fellers a name. Seen him sneakin' in here several times, on nights when Ellen is workin' down at that supermarket. Roy Tarrent—

yes, you heard me right. Roy Tarrent, the big-shot real estate man."

Before we could ask anything more, the door opened and Ellen and Mrs. Hartley entered the livingroom. Hartley gave us a wink and started for the front door, followed by his wife. Ellen hung back for a moment.

"Don't pay much attention to George," she whispered. "He made a pass at Wanda, and I'm afraid she wasn't very nice about it. Laughed in his face." In a normal tone, she added, "Good night again, Lon, Sheriff."

Carson and I watched the three of them go out the front door. Then I said, "You can't say we don't have any suspects."

"Yeah." The sheriff looked around the room. "I guess Mullins and Avery are still talkin' to people along the block. Maybe they'll come up with somethin' we can use."

I was thinking about Hartley's last remark. "Roy Tarrent," I said. "We're going to have to be careful about tackling him."

"Don't I know it?" Carson sighed. "I wonder if Hartley was levelin' with us, or was it just more spite? Maybe he's got somethin' against Tarrent, like he did against the dead girl."

I nodded. "Could be. But Ellen

does work in Tarrent's real estate office, which makes at least a possible connection between Wanda and him. They could have met through Ellen."

"Yeah," Carson said, and sighed again. "We'll have to check it out."

We crossed the room as we talked, went along the short hallway, and into the dead girl's bedroom. The light was still on, the radio still playing. Of course, the body was gone. Otherwise, the room was just the same, and just as hot.

I went over to an open closet and looked in at a row of dresses and other clothing. Most of the garments were inexpensive and slightly gaudy. Turning, I looked on around the room. A large, glossy photograph of the dead girl was framed on the wall opposite the now empty bed.

No one could deny that Wanda Farris had possessed more than her share of good looks, and if there was something a little predatory about the eyes, and petulant about the full lips, few men were likely to find fault with that.

"You know her, Lon?" the sheriff asked.

"No. Only from what I've heard. Evidently something of a femme fatale. At least by Monroe standards."

Carson snorted. He gestured to-

ward an untidy heap of movie magazines and paperback romances on the nightstand beside the clock-radio, then toward a row of dolls propped on the mirrored dressing table.

"Not hardly what you'd expect a femme fatale's room to look like," he said.

I shrugged. "Maybe it's just what you should expect. Let's get out of here."

Turning off the light and the radio, I led the way back through the house and out the door to the front porch.

The late evening sky was clear, with a pale moon riding overhead and flickers of heat lightning on the horizon. As we stood on the porch, facing the graveled street, the Hartley place was on our left. It was separated from Ellen Dean's house by a narrow driveway and a waist-high hedge.

There weren't many houses in this area—it had started as a new development on the outskirts of Monroe, but the promoter had soon run out of money—and it shouldn't take Carson's deputies long to cover it.

"Here they come now," Carson muttered.

Mullins and Avery plodded across the moon-dappled lawn and joined us on the little porch.

"Naw," Mullins said. "Nobody

seen a thing." He took off his wide-brimmed hat and mopped his face on his sleeve.

"Course, it ain't like it used to be," Avery added. "People don't sit out on their front porches much anymore on warm evenin's. Either in the house with a air-conditioner blowin' on 'em, or out back on their private patios." The skinny deputy sounded a little mad about it. "Damn circus parade could've come along this street tonight, and nobody'd knowed the difference," he finished.

Carson grunted. "Well. Jack, you mind stayin' the night here? You can spend your time takin' a good close look through the dead girl's room. Maybe you'll turn up a diary, givin' the name and address of the killer, written in red. Complete with a photograph and set of prints."

Avery groaned, said, "Good-night," and entered the house. Mullins had his own car, and he drove away toward downtown and the courthouse, leaving the sheriff and me to follow in the county car.

"You want me to take you home?" Carson asked, as we turned off the graveled road onto the highway that was also Monroe's main street.

I hesitated. Coffee and sandwiches with my wife, and a few

hours sleep sounded good. But one of the more silly promises I'd made the voters was that if elected county attorney, I'd personally help investigate every major crime committed in the county. So I said, "No, I'll stick with you awhile."

"Fine. I was thinkin' about drivin' by Roy Tarrent's place; see if he's still up. I'd rather talk to him at home—he lives alone, you know—than at his office."

I agreed. Tarrent's home, an imposing brick structure in what passed as Monroe's exclusive residential neighborhood north of the highway, at first appeared to be dark when we got there. Then I noticed a single lighted window toward the rear of the house.

Carson parked at the curb and we got out.

"How're you going to play this?" I asked as we went up the front walk.

"I don't know. Let's just see what develops."

The sheriff pressed the doorbell button. Moments later a light came on in the front hall. The door swung open and Roy Tarrent peered out at us.

He said, "I'll be darned. I was just about to call your office, Carson. Come in."

We followed Tarrent, a large man beginning to run to fat and

with an air of affluence about him, across the wide hallway and into a room fitted up as a study. He gestured us to chairs facing a walnut desk, then sat down behind the desk. He didn't waste any time.

"Gates, I don't know you very well, but I've heard you're a sensible man. I know Ed Carson here is. So let me lay it on the line. I've been having what used to be called an affair with Wanda Farris. All right—I'm fifty-five, and she was in her mid-twenties. I say 'was' because I know she was murdered tonight. I didn't do it." Tarrent abruptly stopped. He leaned back in his chair, and looked from one to the other of us with calm arrogance.

Neither Carson nor I spoke for a moment. Tarrent's ready statement had caught us off balance. I wondered how he had found out about the murder, assuming he wasn't the killer, and he answered the question before I could ask it.

"Ellen Dean called me around eleven-thirty-half an hour ago. She knew, of course, about her sister and myself. Matter of fact, Ellen introduced us one day when Wanda came into my offices downtown to see Ellen."

The sheriff and I exchanged a wry glance. We couldn't complain about a reluctance to speak on

Tarrent's part, without prompting.

"When did you last see Wanda?" the sheriff asked now.

"I spoke to her on the phone late this afternoon. I haven't actually seen her since Wednesday—day before yesterday. She told me this afternoon that she must see me tonight." Tarrent's broad face creased in a frown. "Had something very important to tell me, she said. Sounded real happy and excited about it." Tarrent drummed stubby fingers on the desk, still frowning. He went on, "She was supposed to come here, to my house, around nine o'clock. She never showed up."

"You don't know what this 'something important' was?" I asked the real estate man.

For a moment he lost some of his self-assurance. "No . . . At least, I . . . no."

"And you didn't go out to the Dean place, or try to call Wanda, to find out why she hadn't come?"

Tarrent shook his head decisively. "Certainly not. I don't operate that way."

Ed Carson was thoughtfully stroking a forefinger along his shaggy, pepper-and-salt mustache. "Have you ever been out there to see the girl?"

"Yes. On a couple of occasions. But that's neither here nor there. The point is that I did not see

Wanda tonight, and I most assuredly didn't kill her. I would have no motive for doing so. Gates? You look skeptical."

I was getting a little tired of his arrogant attitude. "I can think of a couple of motives, Tarrent. Blackmail, for a starter."

He snorted. "Nonsense. What could that girl do to me? Sure, I wouldn't care to have our relationship shouted over loudspeakers in



the square downtown, but it certainly wouldn't do me any great harm. My wife has been dead ten years. I have no children or close relatives. I don't care what people might think. My position in Monroe doesn't depend on people's opinions of my personal life."

From where I sat, I couldn't see any flaws in his argument any more than I could see this big, self-important man making love to a girl, then following her into her

bedroom and plunging an ice pick into her back.

Carson evidently felt the same way. He sighed, put his hands on the arms of his chair, pushed to his feet. I also got up. For a moment Tarrent didn't move.

"One thing," he said then. "If it's possible to keep this—relationship—quiet, I'd appreciate it. Not for my sake, but Ellen Dean's a dear woman. She's been a good friend, as well as a good employee, for fifteen years. As I said, she knew how it was between Wanda and me. But if it were made public, well, Ellen's the type who would care. She'd care very much."

I asked curiously, "What did Ellen think about it?"

Tarrent shrugged heavy shoulders. "She didn't like it, of course, but there was nothing she could do about it."

"She could have kicked Wanda out, at least," I said.

"What?" Tarrent blinked in surprise. "The house belonged to Wanda, not Ellen. Oh, I know Ellen was living there first, but was renting it. Two years ago, when Wanda moved here, Wanda bought the house with money she got in her divorce settlement. My firm handled the deal."

Now Tarrent rose and escorted us to the front door.

As we were going out, I paused.

"Tarrent, did you know of any other—menfriends—Wanda might have had?"

"There weren't any to know about. Not since she and I started our arrangement, anyhow. That was six months ago. Before that, she'd had several casual affairs, or so I understand. I couldn't care less about that."

Carson and I left. At the county car, I looked back. Tarrent was still at the door, a large black silhouette against the light from the hallway.

"Some guy," I said, as we pulled away from the curb.

"Yeah," the sheriff said. "Some guy." He headed the car for the downtown area.

"Frankly, I believe him," I said. "Unless he is one heckuva good bluffer."

Carson didn't answer. He seemed to be in deep thought. Finally, he said, so softly I could hardly hear him, "No. I don't care who the man was. She wouldn't be dressed like that."

"What're you muttering about?" I asked.

"What? Oh. Nothin', Lon."

We rode the rest of the way into Monroe's meager downtown district in silence. As we passed the bank, I noticed by the illuminated clock on its front that it was fifteen minutes after midnight, less than

two hours since I'd first heard that Wanda Farris had been murdered.

Now Carson turned into the driveway that bisected the courthouse square, and stopped behind the ancient stone heap that was the Pokochobee County Courthouse. We went in through the back door and along the echoing ground-floor corridor to the sheriff's office.

Buck Mullins was alone in the big, dingy main office, sitting at one of the desks near the battered radio transceiver. He was talking on the phone. "Here's Ed now, Doc," Mullins said as we entered. He extended the telephone to Carson, and added, "Doc Johnson."

Carson took the phone. "Yes, Doc?"

I saw that the call was on line two. Picking up another phone, I punched the "two" button, and listened in.

"... so you move the time of the murder back a bit," Doc was saying. "The heat in that bedroom bollixed up the works, but now I'd say the girl was killed somewhere between six and nine. Like I thought, there ain't any signs on the body that she was assaulted. She wasn't beat up or anythin' like that."

I put in, "Doc, did you find out what Wanda was doing out there at the hospital?"

Doc laughed. "Yes, I did. I looked up the case file. She came out for some lab tests. Thought she was pregnant, but she wasn't. Now I can tell you for absolute sure she wasn't. So I don't guess that's any help."

"Maybe it is," I said slowly.

I put down my phone, while Carson and the doctor went on with their conversation. I walked over to one of the tall, flyspecked office windows and looked out at the night.

So Wanda had thought, or hoped, that she was pregnant. That could explain the call to Tarrent, the 'something important' she was so excited about. Only she wasn't pregnant after all. But there was no reason she shouldn't pretend she was, at least long enough to get Tarrent to marry her . . . But in that case, Tarrent must have been the man out at the house who had drunk bourbon and played around with Wanda, losing his necktie in the process, and that I just couldn't see. Not Roy Tarrent. Then who the heck was the other man? The one who had in fact lost his necktie, and all the rest?

"Damn," I said aloud, and whacked a fist against the grimy windowsill.

"Know what you mean," Ed Carson said, behind me.

I turned, followed him into his

private cubbyhole that opened off one side of the main office. I took a chair while Carson sat down behind his beat-up desk and scaled his hat toward the top of a file cabinet.

"Doc have anything else to say?" I asked.

"Nothin' important."

I told him what I had been thinking. "But who could this other man be, to make her break the date with Tarrent? Somebody with more money—if that's possible—that she decided she could pull the pregnancy bit on, with more chance of success than with Tarrent?"

Carson shook his head. His leathery face was lined with fatigue. His moustache looked as wilted as his sweat-stained khaki shirt.

"Oh," he said then, "you 'member I told Buck to call New Orleans, try to check on Frank Farris? He did. Turns out Farris ain't been home for a week."

I leaned forward with dawning excitement. "Maybe—"

"He's down in South America," Carson broke in. "With his new wife. On their honeymoon."

I sat back with a sigh. "So much for the discarded husband appearing out of the night to take a belated revenge."

"So much," Carson agreed wea-

rily. "Now, where do we look?"

I studied him a moment. "What's bugging you? You've been acting funny ever since we left Tarrent's place."

"I have an idea, Lon. Only I don't see how it could be true. Ever'thing fits together except one item. And *it* won't fit no how, no way."

"Let's hear it."

"How well do you know Ellen Dean?" he asked, abruptly changing the subject, or so I thought.

"Ellen? Not well at all," I said. "We were in high school at the same time in the forties, but we didn't travel in the same crowds. Ellen was kind of a loner. Not attractive, seldom dated, more or less a wallflower. Since then, I've just said 'hello' to her when we'd meet on a street in town here, and that's about it. Why?"

Carson shook his head. He mused, "Course, I knew who she was, and I've heard the usual town gossip about the younger girl, Wanda. Since they lived together, I thought they must get along. Now, I wonder . . ."

I was beginning to see where he was heading. I tried a laugh that didn't quite come off. "You can't mean you're thinking Ellen had a part in this? Everything points to a man, for gosh sakes."

"Not quite," the sheriff said.

Suddenly he picked up the desk phone. "Wasn't it Fulman's Super-market where Ellen was supposed to've worked this evenin'?"

I nodded. I still couldn't believe he was serious. And yet—

Cradling the phone on his bony shoulder, Carson was thumbing through the telephone book. "Here it is," he muttered. "Harry Fulman, manager, home phone number . . ."

Seconds later he had Harry Fulman on the line. A minute after that, he slammed down the phone and glared across the desk at me.

"All right, so it was a crazy idea," he growled.

"I take it Ellen was definitely at the store between seven and ten, like she said."

"Yeah. Every blessed minute, according to Fulman, and he'd know. She didn't even go to the powder room. Stayed right on the check-out line the full three hours."

I got up, did a turn around the cramped little office and suddenly stopped, gawking at a calendar hanging on the wall behind Carson's desk. The picture on the calendar was a rather sickening thing entitled "Love's Labor Won—And Lost."

"I remember now," I said. "Sure. Three or four years ago, Ellen was supposed to be going to marry Frank Farris. But then Farris mar-

ried Wanda instead. I wonder if—”

Carson whistled softly. “You be-ginnin’ to see what I mean? For-get the stage setting—the bottle of booze, the two glasses, the necktie—all that, and what have you got? A woman lyin’ dead in her bed-room. A woman who could’ve been killed before—*before*—Ellen Dean left at six-thirty.”

I dropped into my chair and lit a cigarette. I needed it. “That would explain the air-conditioner being off in the bedroom, so the intense heat would make it hard to determine accurately the time of death.”

“Uh huh, and— You’re a mar-ried man, Lon. Tell me, can you imagine your wife, back when you all were courtin’, havin’ you over to her house for a date and then wearin’ a faded, worn-out robe?”

I thought about it and saw what he meant. Wanda Farris would never have entertained a man, any man, clad in that obviously old robe. A new robe—or no robe at all—sure. But not that one. Of course, the guest could have ar-rived unexpectedly, but the first thing Wanda would have done was change into something a good deal more enticing.

Carson had been watching my face. Now he chuckled wryly. “Yeah. It’s impossible. I should have caught it sooner, but the

setup was so obvious—like it was supposed to be—that the killer had to be a man.”

I ran a hand through what was left of my hair and said, “All right. I’ll buy that the killer could’ve been—maybe must’ve been—a woman. It still couldn’t have been Ellen. She has a cast iron alibi, with evidently no loop-holes in it. She couldn’t have turned on the light in Wanda’s room at nine o’clock. So who did?”

“That’s what I can’t figure out,” Carson snapped irritably. “Two witnesses saw that light come on at nine. If it was just George Hart-ley—but his wife saw it, too!”

A phone burred in the main office, and I dimly heard Buck Mullins answering it. “Yeah?” A long pause, then, “No kiddin’. Yeah, I’ll tell Ed.” A moment later Mullins loomed in the open door-way.

“What now?” Carson asked.

“That was Avery, callin’ from the Dean place,” the big deputy rumbled. “Thinks he might’ve found the weapon the girl was killed with.”

Carson got up. “What?”

“Yeah. It was an ice pick.”

“Let’s get out there,” the sheriff said to me. To Mullins he snapped, “You mind the store. I’ll be back directly.”

We made a fast, mostly silent trip back to the Dean house. Only it was not Ellen Dean's—it had belonged to her sister, Wanda. That fact hadn't seemed to matter much when we heard it from Roy Tarrant. Now, I wasn't so sure.

Avery was waiting for us in the front room of the little house. The skinny deputy's pale eyes glowed with self-satisfaction. He displayed a wicked-looking ice pick lying on the coffee table atop a piece of cellophane.

"Where'd you find it?" Carson asked.

"In a hatbox, along with some old hats; up on a shelf in a closet," Avery said. "Ellen Dean's closet."

I said, "How do you know it's the murder weapon?"

He turned to me. "I ain't certain, Mr. Gates, but I'd bet on it. I'll tell you. I looked all over the dead girl's room, first. Didn't find a thing that'd help us. Then I went across the hall into the other woman's room, just to pass time more'n anything else. Well, sir, when I found that pick in a *hat-box*, I decided to run a test on it. So I got out my kit and tested it for bloodstains, and durned if I didn't find some, right up there at the top. See where the shaft fits into the handle? Right in there. Course, it could be anybody's blood, but—"

"Good work, Jack," the sheriff said. He looked at me. "Well?"

"The light," I said. "There's no getting around that. Unless you want to say Ellen had an accomplice, and that I don't buy."

Avery was watching us curiously. He was a tall, lanky man with heavy-lidded eyes, who looked as if he might fall asleep between one breath and the next. I knew better. Now he said, "What're you all talkin' about?"

Carson explained.

"Heck, that ain't no problem," Avery drawled.

"What!"

"Come on, I'll show you."

Wonderingly, the sheriff and I followed Avery along the familiar hallway and turned into the dead girl's bedroom. In the darkness, Avery fumbled around, found the floor lamp and switched it on.

"Heck," he said then, "ain't you fellers ever seen one of these new clock-radios?"

I looked at the radio on the nightstand, a couple of feet nearer the bed than the floor lamp. I groaned. "I've got one at home," I muttered.

"Sure," Avery grinned. "It's got a plug on the side of it here. You plug in whatever you want turned on, a coffee pot, or what have you—or a lamp—then you set the alarm on the clock to whatever

time you want. When the time comes, on goes the appliance. Simple."

"Yeah, simple," the sheriff said. He bent down, squinted at the clock. "Guess when this is set to go on."

"Nine o'clock," I said.

The sheriff nodded silently. Then he looked at his deputy. "How'd you like my job?"

Avery gave us a sleepy grin. "No hurry, Sheriff. I can wait a couple more years . . ."

Ten minutes later, we were in the front room of the Hartley house next door. Ellen Dean came in. The Hartleys tried to follow, but Deputy Avery firmly kept them out and stayed with them in the next room, the connecting door shut.

Ellen looked worse than she had earlier. Her mousy hair straggled about her thin, dead-white face. "What is it? Have you found out who—"

"Yes, I'm afraid we have, Ellen," I said quietly.

The sheriff stayed in the back-ground. Ellen and I stood facing each other in the center of the ceiling light. Ellen looked up at me, waiting.

"You did it, Ellen," I said.

Her mouth opened and closed. Her eyes darted from side to side, and I thought she was going to

run out of the room, but she didn't. Instead she walked to a chair and sat down. After a moment she nodded.

"All right. All right. There's no use going on with it. I—I guess I'm not cut out for a murderess."

I said, "You stabbed Wanda with an ice pick. Then you set the clock-radio in her room so it would turn on the lamp at nine, while you were at work. When you came home you 'discovered' the body and screamed, bringing the Hartleys over. During the few seconds it took them, you switched the lamp plug from the radio to a wall fixture. We found your thumb and forefinger prints on the plug, Ellen."

She nodded slightly. Not looking at me, she said, "I knew it was almost certain George and Madge would see the light go on. They're out on their patio every evening. So I—I—" She broke off, twisting her thin fingers together in her lap.

I wished I were anywhere else but there, watching the disintegration of a woman I'd thought I knew, but I said, "Why did you do it?"

Now she looked at me, and there was a strange glitter in her dark eyes. "Why?" she cried. "I'll tell you why. I hated her! She was evil, selfish. She didn't deserve to

live! She was a greedy parasite!"

Carson said from his corner, "But your own sister—"

"Sister! She didn't know the meaning of the word. All she knew was take, and take, and take—" She broke off, her face twitching with anger. Then, in a controlled voice, she went on, "All our lives she took away everything I wanted, just by crooking her little finger. First, there was Frank Farris; and now—now she was going to force Roy Tarrent to marry her, by telling him a lie, that she was pregnant. Oh, how she laughed when she told me about that at dinner." Again she stopped.

"Go on, Ellen," I prompted softly.

"Look at me, Lon. I'm a plain woman. No man ever thought of me as anything but—just never thought of me—except for Roy Tarrent. Over the years we'd become very close, at least at the office, and I had hopes—hopes. But then Wanda came. I'm glad I killed her."

I glanced helplessly toward Car-

son. He came forward. "You'll have to come along with me, Miss Dean."

"Yes. Of course." Slowly, trembling all over, she got up.

I blurted, "Ellen, you'll have to go to prison. But no jury will send you to the gas chamber."

She gave me a strange look. "I'm not afraid of death, Lon. Not now. It's life that frightens me . . ."

Hours later, after Ellen Dean had been booked on a murder charge and placed in the women's ward of the county jail, Ed Carson drove me home.

"I ain't sure which one I feel more sorry for," Carson said. "Wanda or Ellen. Seems like both of them was kind of—driven. Like they didn't have much control over their lives."

I looked out through the windshield at the moon, far down now in the west. It would soon be morning. "All our yesterdays make today," I said.

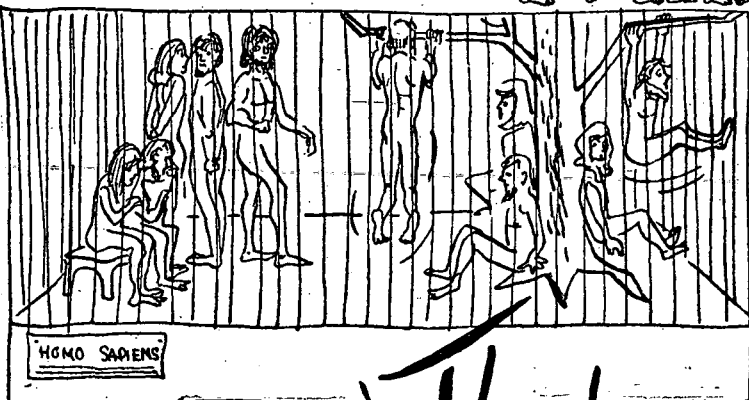
"Huh?"

"Nothing, Ed. Nothing. Just some silly tune I heard, somewhere or other."



Perhaps history will record some of man's greatest achievements as mistakes—depending on the historian.

VISIT TO THE ZOO



by Theodore Pratt

THE little girl, who looked to be about seven, danced ahead of her mother on the path in the zoo. She was flaxen-haired and had, almost literally, the face of a doll. The faces in the crowd at the zoo were totally doll-like in expression, like exhibits in a wax museum. While their faces were empty and vacuous, that of the girl had some animation.

The little girl stopped on the path, turned to her mother and called, "What are we going to see next?"

"Human beings." Her mother reproduced her in appearance, except that her face, when she per-

mitted it, seemed even more mobile, far from being as wax-like as those of the others. She wore a blue-flowered dress.

The girl said, with anticipation, "I've never seen a human being."

"You will, Dor, when we get to their cage."

"Where is their cage?"

The girl's mother now caught up with her, and they went on together. "Right next to the monkeys."

"Are they as funny as the monkeys?"

"Well, I guess not."

"Why haven't we ever seen human beings before?"

"Because our zoo never had any."

"Are they rare?"

Her mother smiled. "Quite rare, Dor."

"Are they valuable?"

"Very valuable."

A moment later a security officer, dressed in a light blue jump-suit uniform of metallic material, stepped in front of them, seeming to materialize from nowhere. A disintegrator hung from his belt, ready.

The little girl gave an initial cry, then clung tightly to her mother's skirt. The mother blanched and stood very still, her face now as dead set as any of the others.

The security officer asked, in a

surly, menacing voice, "Name?" "M415698."

"Your conversation has been monitored. It sounded as if you were teaching the child that there is good to humans."

"Oh, no!"

"You told her they were rare and valuable."

"Only in the sense that there are very few of them, and on that account they are valuable as specimens in a zoo, like any other animal."

The security officer studied her. "Do you know any human who is loose in our fine robot world and pretending to be one of us?"

"None."

She was examined closely by penetrating eyes. She stared back steadfastly.

"You were also heard to call the girl by an unnumbered name. You know this is forbidden. What is her name?"

"X218434."

"Call her that way."

"I will obey."

"Be careful what you say to her."

"I will follow your order."

The security officer stepped aside and let them continue.

As they went on toward the cage for humans, the girl looked up and said, "Mummy, he scared me."

"Never mind. He was only doing his duty."

"Once one like that came to our school and asked questions of a teacher, and they took her away and we never saw her again."

Her mother looked about fearfully. "Don't speak of it anymore, X218434."

"I like my other name better. The one you and Daddy call me—'Dor.'"

"Hush! We've come to the humans."

Quite a crowd was gathered in front of a sizable cage holding an even dozen human beings. The humans were naked, but their skins were not stark white, for they lived a good deal in the sun and had taken on a healthy looking tan. There were six women and six men. Several of the women and men were young, perhaps in their very early twenties, while the others were older, and one couple, who clung together, were wrinkled with age.

Only this couple, as though of another time, seemed to be ashamed of their nakedness and make any attempt to hide it. The others appeared to be inured to it. They stared back at the crowd scrutinizing them, or went about their business, which was not much. A few of them paced about, walking briskly up and down in the confines of their cage, exercising. The doors to their night

quarters were closed so they were forced to be on open view.

A sign was hung on the iron bars of the cage which read:

HOMO SAPIENS. Human beings. Now nearly extinct. Once found over nearly all the world in many races. These are Caucasian specimens.

Do Not Feed

Some in the crowd called out taunts to the humans in the cage. Others, in spite of the warning on the sign, threw peanuts at them. These were ignored until one young man, soon after Dor and her mother arrived, grinned at the crowd, stooped, picked up a peanut, shucked it and ate it. His face, like those of his companions, was animated, human.

One member of the crowd called out angrily and unreasonably, "Think you're better than us, do you?"

Equally, and grinning again, the young human replied, "We're better than any robot ever made or born."

The one baiting him demanded, "Then what are you doing in there while we're out here?"

The crowd laughed gleefully at that, but even in laughter no one smiled.

The human replied, "With you out there, we'd rather be in here."

The crowd muttered angrily.

Though their voices were full of fury their emotion did not show in their faces, which remained set and expressionless.

Others on both sides joined in the insults.

"Dummy face!" another human in the cage called. "You can't even smile."

"Grinner! All you do is grin!"

"All you are is a machine that can talk, but you'll never have anything to say."

As the exchange kept on, Dor stared at the humans. She did not seem to be bothered by their nakedness, though she asked her mother, "Why aren't they given any clothes?"

"I guess so they can be seen better." Her mother looked around carefully, then said in a lower voice, "And perhaps to humiliate them."

Dor made what sounded like a considered observation. "They look just like us."

"That's because when humans controlled the world a long time ago, and first made robots, they made them to look just like themselves. Then later, when robots were made of flesh and blood, no one could tell the difference between them and humans."

"Then humans found a way for robots to have children and we took over the world, killing off

most of the humans," Dor said, as though reciting history taught to her in school.

"That's right."

"There were a lot of battles and the humans nearly won, but we ran all their machines, including weapons, so we beat them in the end."

"Yes. We beat them."

"They teach us in school that humans are bad."

Her mother didn't say anything.

"They don't look bad."

Her mother did not reply.

"I like their faces. They look so lively."

Her mother cautioned, "Don't say anything more like that."

"Well, I wouldn't make fun of them. I especially wouldn't if they had some children. Why aren't there any children in the cage?"

"I guess they just didn't have any for our zoo. Maybe one of the human couples will have a baby."

Dor danced up and down. "If they do can we come again?"

Her mother nodded, and Dor said, "I'd like to see a little girl-human in the cage." She stared at the humans while others in the crowd taunted them.

Her mother also stared. She looked in particular at the young man who had eaten the peanut. He looked back at her casually, then turned and spoke to another of the young men, who, in a moment,



also looked at the mother. It was only a fleeting glance, and to anyone seeing it, it had no meaning. In turn, he spoke to another, who also glanced casually at the woman outside the cage. This went on until all the humans had glimpsed her. She stood, without making any sign that she was aware of their attention.

That evening, in their small

squares in the great robot living complex, after Dor had sat curled up on the lap of her father, whose secret name was Ral, and had told him about that day's visit to the zoo, she was sent off to bed with a kiss and a hug from both her parents. Immediately after her door was closed, Ral motioned to his wife to sit on the couch near him. He was a tall, almost handsome man whose features, at least at home, showed no waxy expression.

The complex's piped-in music was turned up loudly so their voices were drowned in it as they whispered. Ral said, "Give me your version, Ab."

First she told him about the security officer questioning her.

"Did it sound as if he connected you with going to see the humans?"

"I don't know, Ral, I just don't know!"

Ral mused, "I don't see how he could have. It must have been just coincidence, caused by what you said to Dor." In spite of what he said it was apparent that he was worried.

"Oh, Ral, sometimes I don't think it's worth it, trying to establish a human underground in this robot world. I don't mean for ourselves, but the danger to Dor. And when we tell her she's not a robot

but a real human being like us—"

"It's worth it," he assured her. "If they ever catch us, others will continue the work. We're going faster all the time now," he whispered. "They call us nearly extinct, but you know how many we've got in the robot world, some of them in responsible positions. In time, we'll have them in top places and by then we'll have enough infiltrated in the robot government to take over, return them to being machines, and make it a human world again."

"I hope so, Ral, I hope so. I can't go around much longer putting on a robot face. And calling Dor by that awful number, even ourselves."

"The first thing we'll do," Ral assured her, "is correct the biggest mistake man made—science developing their ability to reproduce."

"The biggest mistake," Ab whispered through the music, "was inventing them in the first place."

"Maybe so," Ral said. "Right now tell me about the people in the zoo. You were detailed to make the first contact with them. From our underground report we knew who was being sent here. Was it right?"

"As far as I could see," Ab told him, "it was exactly right. The one named Ja knew me from the description you said had been given

him—that I'd wear a blue-flowered dress and have a child with me. Without showing any sign of this he gave me the peanut-eating signal, so I knew him. Then he looked at me and told the others."

"No one noticed?"

"I don't think so."

"It's he and his wife, young No, that we're taking out first. We'll follow the usual procedure. Our people here will get to the cage in the night and release them, only them at first. Everything is ready for them, a place here in the robot world, squares to live in, clothes, identities, papers, a place for him to work. I hope they've both practiced enough assuming the wax expression."

"That's the worst of it all," Ab complained, "having to do that. You've seen how it has affected even Dor; because everybody around her except us has the robot look, she's taken it on, too. I hope we can make it a human world before it gets too set on her."

"We will," he assured her.

"Ral, what about the old couple in the zoo? Will they be taken out, too, later?"

Ral shook his head. "They were given their chance years ago, but didn't want to take the risk. Now they'll have to stay in the zoo. We can't afford to waste time and energy on them."

She whispered under the music. "That seems as heartless as the robots."

"It's a question of resources and strength. Don't forget, we'll need every ounce we have."

"Oh, Ral . . ." Ab wept. He put his arms around her and held her, kissing her. She swallowed repeatedly to control her voice, and finally whispered, "I don't want to seem weak . . ."

"You're only being human," he said. "Which is something no robot could ever be."

They jumped as the outer door was flung open with a crash. Four security robots, clad in their dread blue metallic jump suits, burst in. They were dummy-faced, their expressions dead set. Their hands held disintegration weapons.

Ral and Ab sat, very still, on the couch. Ab glanced toward the hall which led to Dor's room; no sound came from there. Ral asked the robots, "How did you—"

"For some time now," he was told, "we have had a way to monitor even whispers spoken under loud music. You have been sus-

pected for long. The questioning of your wife this afternoon was a part of it, and led to this."

"What are you going to do?"

The robot who had spoken held up his disintegrator.

"No!" Ab cried. "Not our child! Not—"

"The child," the robot told them, "will be taken to the zoo."

"But she doesn't even know she's human!" Ab protested. "She's—"

"Stand up! Both of you!"

Ab could not make her legs work. Ral pulled her to her feet and supported her. They stood there, Ab limply, wavering, turning to look down the hall.

Two robots lifted their weapons. There was a slight hiss from each. Instantly Ral and Ab were gone. All that remained were two small heaps of dust on the floor.

One security robot ordered, "Get the child."

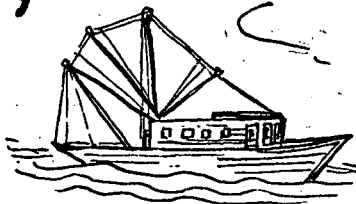
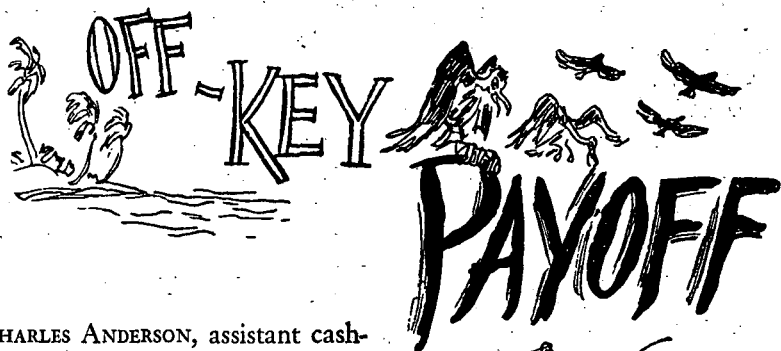
Two of them moved down the hall.

In the zoo there would now be a little girl-human in the Homo sapiens cage. It would be some time before she found her way out.



The axiomatic proof of the pudding is in the eating; or, cherchez le motif.

OFF-KEY PAYOFF



CHARLES ANDERSON, assistant cashier of the Second National Bank, strode along Miami's Flagler Street oblivious to the late afternoon's searing sunlight. He appeared fresh and trim in a lightweight suit, his shirt collar was unwilted and his tie carefully knotted, and his bench-made shoes glistened. He was thirty-five, but looked younger, only a tinge of gray at his temples giving the lie to his unlined features and high coloring.

He turned right at the first corner, and in the middle of the block descended three stone steps to an open doorway above which appeared an unlit neon sign lettered COCKTAIL LOUNGE. It was his custom to stop in each Friday

afternoon for two pre-dinner gin-and-tonics before returning to the bank for the seven-to-nine evening shift. Originally he had been uneasy under the hardeyed regard of

by
J. DAN
MARLOWE

some of the lounge's habitués, but the place was directly on the route from the bank to his apartment, and it was easier to keep stopping in than to go out of his way to another. After some months, in fact, recognition and even acceptance of a sort was accorded him. Inside the front entrance, he paused to let his eyes adjust to the sudden absence of light.

"Here's Charlie now," an energetic voice announced from the gloom. "Told you I could set my watch by him on a Friday afternoon. Bring him a gin-an'-tonic, Max, an' a slug o' bitterroot for me. Bring somethin' for yourself, too." Bottles and glasses clinked in the background. "How you stay so cool lookin' in all this heat, man?" the voice continued. "Easy tellin' it's no coal mine you make your bread in."

Charles Anderson advanced to the only occupied table in the dingy room and sat down across the table from its single occupant. "A bank doesn't sweat a man too much, Ted," he said easily.

"Not like a shrimp boat," Ted agreed. He was a wiry, crewcut blond in T-shirt, unbelted slacks, and rope sandals. His bare forearms were corded with muscle and colored the rich hue of Spanish-leather mahogany. His pale-irised eyes had dark pupils, giving

them a hot, questing look even in repose. "Unload it an' park it, man," he greeted the burly man in a wrap-around bartender's apron who approached them, tray in hand. "You're not gonna get any live ones in here 'til the sun goes down."

"Scorcher today, Mr. Anderson," Max said, placing the tray on the table. He removed his apron and sat down with them. His heavy, swarthy features had at one time suffered a shocking blow. A serrated scar ran jaggedly up his right cheek to his unruly shock of black hair, the scar's thick corrugations suggesting an original lack of prompt medical attention.

"Health," Ted toasted, raising his glass. "You goin' back to work tonight, Charlie?"

"Yes, unfortunately," Charles Anderson replied. "I'd much prefer going to the concert."

Ted looked at Max. "Whyn't you let him make that deposit for you tonight an' save yourself a trip in the mornin'?"

"Yeah, that's right," Max said. "It would—"

"I wouldn't like to be responsible for your money, Max," Charles Anderson interrupted mildly.

"I'd call it a favor if you could see your way clear, Mr. Anderson," Max said. He reached into a pocket, took out a bulge of folded

bills, and spread the opened sheaf fanwise between Ted's glass and his own. "I sold my sister's house for her today an' I don't like to have this kind of cash layin' around tonight."

Charles Anderson leaned forward to look at the money more closely. He put down his glass, picked up the topmost bill, and fingered it. He glanced overhead at the inadequate lighting, started to say something, but changed his mind. Picking up the wad of bills, he counted them down rapidly onto the table top in two piles, the bills crackling and popping, his hands a blur of speed. Finished, he rested a hand upon the pile larger by two-thirds than its companion. "I'm sorry to have to be the one to tell you, Max," he said soberly. "This stack is counterfeit."

"Counterfeit!" Ted breathed.

"And not very good counterfeit," Charles Anderson added.

Ted shook his crewcut head. "Your sister's really gonna wring you out on this deal, Max," he predicted.

Max had pushed back his chair, his dark features suffused with angry blood. "It's your fault!" he growled. "You're the one who introduced me to the no-account who gave it to me!"

Ted looked hurt. "Only because the guy's twenty-four footer was

tied up two slips away from my boat down on Saddle Bunch Keys, Max. How was I supposed to know the guy was a crook?"

Max ignored the rhetorical question. "Down on Saddle Bunch Keys is where I'll start lookin' for that joker," he said grimly. "I'll teach that wisenheimer a thing or three about passin' phony money around."

"I'll go with you," Ted announced. "Seein' as how I'm never gonna hear the end of it anyway if you don't locate him."

"You should call the police immediately, Max," Charles Anderson suggested. "They'll put you in touch with the Treasury Department. Counterfeiting comes under the jurisdiction of the Secret Service, a branch of the Treasury." He waited, but Max remained silent. "You don't agree?"

Max placed a big hand on the stack of counterfeit bills. "Mr. Anderson, if the police get in on it before I make this character give me good money for bad, don't I get stuck with this batch of phony paper?"

"You do, indeed," Anderson admitted. "But it's the only proper method—"

"The carache I'll get from my sister is nothin' to the one you're gonna get from me if *that* happens," Max promised Ted. "No,



what I need to do is go down there an' lay hold of that weasel an' straighten him out, an' when I get my money I'll turn him over to—"

"You'll go down there an' get paid off in rubber all over again,"

Ted interrupted him. "How you gonna *know*, man?" He snatched up a bill from each pile on the table top, put his hands behind his back and passed the bills rapidly back and forth, then brought his hands up on the table again, pre-

senting the bills to Max. "Go ahead, hotshot," he invited. "Tell me which is the queer."

Max's shock of black hair bent down over the table. He touched the bills experimentally, picked them up, and turned them over and over. "I think this one looks—" he began.

"An' your boy will be a quarter mile down the road while you're makin' like a magnifyin' glass," Ted jeered. "It takes someone like Charlie here to sort out the good from the bad just by the look an' the feel." He stopped. As if on joint swivels, his and Max's heads turned toward Charles Anderson.

"I got no right to even ask Mr. Anderson," Max said at once. "It's none of his trouble."

"How about it, Charlie?" Ted challenged. "You game to ride down to Saddle Bunch with us an' keep this big mule from gettin' clipped all over again?"

"I'm working tonight," Charles replied. "And it's not the right procedure. You should—"

"Ahhhhh, come on," Ted wheedled. "We got to move on this. If we hang around talkin' to official types, this counterfeit passin' jack-rabbit's likely to take off up the Inland Waterway or head out to the Dry Tortugas till the heat's off. Come on down with us. You'd be doin' Max a big favor."

"Well—" Anderson hesitated. "Let me call the bank and see if they can get someone to take over for me."

"Attaboy," Ted approved. "The phone booth's in the corner."

He and Max sat in silence for a moment after Charles Anderson rose to his feet and walked to the booth. "I told you we couldn't pass the stuff, Max," Ted said softly.

"I still don't see how he could tell in this dim light," Max argued.

"If you worked with the bunch of it he does every day, you could tell, too. So now we switch. He goes out on the boat with us."

"On the *boat*?" Max's voice had risen. He glanced toward the phone booth and lowered his volume. "What for?"

"So Sanchez don't pay us off for *this* load of .50 calibers with a wad of funny money an' a little of the McCoy top an' bottom of it." Ted leaned across the table. "When a pile of cash changes hands in the forty watt wheelhouse light of a shrimper, a citizen like Charlie has his uses." His pale-irised eyes studied Max. "Get the picture?"

"Not all of it. What do we do if Sanchez hands us queer again?"

"When Charlie spots it, we say heh-heh-heh, boys will be boys, Sanchez, but you had your little joke now, pal, so spring with the

Government Printin' Office variety for this load an' what you short-changed us before. He wants the guns, so he'll do it."

Max thought it over. "So why do we need Anderson? Why don't we just wring it out of Sanchez?"

"You gonna guarantee what kind of cash he hands over, even with a gun in his belly? We need Charlie to be sure. 'Course, when we see what part of his boat Sanchez goes to when he re-boards it to get us the real thing after Charlie catches him in the flim-flam, it'll cut down the area we have to search afterwards for his whole bankroll."

Max blinked. "Afterwards?"

"After we deep-six him," Ted said coolly. "Him an' his boy Julio." His hot-looking eyes bored across the table. "I don't like people who pay off for good guns with funny money."

Max nodded slowly. "Then what about him?" he asked, jerking a thumb in the direction of the phone booth.

"So you'll need another Friday afternoon two gin-an'-tonics customer," Ted said, and waited. Max remained silent. "Okay. After we get rid of them, I vote for takin' the load over to Galveston an' peddlin' it there. With Sanchez' bundle, it should make a nice piece of change."

"Why'd you let him make a phone call, then?" Max demanded. "He's probably spillin' the whole bit about the counterfeit to someone at the bank."

"It don't matter," Ted said flatly. After Galveston, I'm takin' a South American vacation, an' so will you if you're smart. You're just about payin' the light bill here, anyway. Turn the key in the lock." He waited again, and again Max said nothing. "Right. Now when we make the meet with Sanchez out there, here's the way I wanna see it go—"

The crewcut blond head and the bushy black one came together over the center of the table.

"—certainly I'm sure, Mr. Fenton," Charles Anderson said eagerly in the phone booth, glancing over his shoulder to make sure it wasn't being approached. "I'm positive that these are the twenties that have been plaguing us. Will you call the Coast Guard and tell them the place is on Saddle Bunch Keys near Ted Gentry's anchorage? It's the best I can do for a location."

"This is all highly irregular, Anderson." Mr. Fenton's protesting tone was querulous. "Who *are* these men? And why should you become personally involved? The whole affair sounds harebrained to me. Why don't we wait and let Mr.

Davies take care of it tomorrow?"

God give me strength, Charles Anderson thought. *Why did I ever call old Fussbudget Fenton? Naturally he wouldn't understand that I don't intend to remain an assistant cashier all my life. There could even be a bonus accompanying the promotion.* "Will you kindly just call the Coast Guard, Mr. Fenton?" he pleaded, holding his voice down with difficulty. If Ted or Max should overhear—"

"I still don't believe—"

"Please!" Anderson cut in urgently.

"I was just on my way out to dinner," Fenton complained.

"Call them!" Charles snapped, his patience gone. He hung up the phone, pasted a smile on his face, and returned to the table.

Charles sat on a three-legged stool in a corner of the wheelhouse of the shrimp boat *Araminta B.*, his stomach queasy from the constant pitching motion. The events of the previous hour had confused him. No sooner had Max's car pulled in alongside Ted's wharfage than Ted had sprinted out on the dock, pointing to a sail glinting to the southwest in the fading sunlight.

"There he goes!" he called stridently. "Hop aboard an' we'll sail!"

They had tumbled aboard so speedily, despite Charles Anderson's protests, that he had removed a nip of skin from one ankle in the process. There had been no sign at all of the Coast Guard. Unless they were giving Ted and Max rope before hauling in on the slack? he wondered hopefully. He had wandered the deck uneasily while Max and Ted pulled on dusty, fishy-odored coveralls. They pursued the sail which seemed to have an independent will-o'-the-wisp life of its own. Once he mentioned half-heartedly to Ted his doubt that it was the same sail, even, but Ted had seemed confident, and then the quick tropical dusk had enveloped them.

Retreating to the wheelhouse, Charles listened to the creaks and groans of the bulbous mast as it swung in slow, steady arcs in the calm sea. Occasionally he could hear the hollow thump of a wave under the bow, and feel the planks vibrating beneath his feet from the throb of the engine as he stared off astern into the gathering darkness. Where were the Coast Guard? In the starless night he could barely make out on deck the winches and boom arms amidships.

He rose from his stool and peered out the wheelhouse windows. The blackness outside was impenetrable. "How can you tell

where we're going?" he asked Max, who was standing impassively at the wheel. Max didn't reply.

I shouldn't bother him, Anderson resolved, but a further disquieting thought struck him: where were their running lights? He opened his mouth to inquire, and closed it again. Instinct told him that something was radically wrong.

As he looked, a lantern flared amidships, and he could see Ted's wiry figure move forward and set it on the stubby bowsprit. In seconds he had placed another two-thirds of the way up the mast. Sensing the irregularity, Anderson's apprehension was heightened. "We're out quite a way, aren't we?" he ventured despite his previous resolution. When Max remained silent, Charles forced himself to return to his stool.

He rose to his feet again as a shrill whistle from up forward brought an acknowledging grunt from Max. Peering through the windows again, he could see nothing at all, but he hesitated to ask another question. He could hear the quick pad-pad of Ted's sneakered feet on the deck. "What's Ted doing?" he asked, tried beyond endurance.

Max didn't answer.

Charles was still standing by the

windows when a thick coil of rope soared up over the rail from the darkness below, to be caught by Ted and made fast. Straining his eyes, he could barely make out a small boat bobbing at the end of the line. A man swarmed up the line, hand over hand, unaided by Ted who had melted into the shadows at the stern.

The man walked toward the wheelhouse after deftly muscling himself over the rail and onto the deck. Off to starboard, Charles caught a glimpse of a long, dark shape with bowsprit and mast lights that matched their own. The forward light went out as he stared at it, to be followed seconds later by the mast light.

Max had seen them go out, too. "Wise guy," he muttered, and spun the wheel, then craned his neck to peer out into the inky night where the lights had been.

The man who had boarded the *Araminta B.* opened the wheelhouse door. He was middle-aged, slender, and dark-complexioned, dressed in khakis, a dirty yachting cap, and crepe-soled canvas shoes. His features were hatchet-sharp beneath graying hair, and his brown eyes were piercing. He stared at Charles Anderson, then smiled. "Good evening, Max," he said in excellent English. "If I may verify that everything is in order

before we go further this night—”

“How ‘bout my verifyin’ while you’re verifyin’, Sanchez?” Max countered, not looking at him.

“Why not, between friends?” Sanchez agreed. He unbuttoned his shirt, revealing a wide-banded money belt resting against his smooth brown skin. He unzipped its center section and handed Max a thick pad of bills. “Verify away, compadre.”

Max handed the bills to Charles, who felt an inward tremor at their bulk. He swallowed hard, but took himself reluctantly to the chart table and began counting beneath the single dim light. Despite his dexterity, it took him a long time. “One hundred twenty thousand,” he said finally in a shaky voice, and stared at the piles of money, one-four times larger than the other.

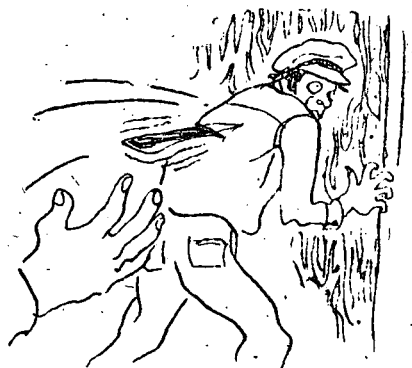
“It is possible to be too clever, senior,” Sanchez said evenly to Max, then his voice filled the small space unexpectedly: “Sheer off, Julio!” he bellowed. “Sheer off!” and he turned and sprinted for the wheelhouse door.

Charles Anderson stared in petrified disbelief as Max abandoned the wheel and pounced like a big cat. The haft of a knife suddenly protruded from between Sanchez’ shoulderblades at the end of the swinging arc of Max’s arm. The

dark man pitched face downward to the floor with a bubbling squeak.

“Max!” Anderson exclaimed in horror.

The big man never even turned his head. “Who’s too clever now, Sanchez?” he muttered, and stepped over the fallen figure en route back to the wheel. “Change in the blueprint, Ted,” he called down the deck.



There was a blur of movement in the stern, but in the same instant a quietly insistent voice drifted across the black water. “Don’ reach under that tarp, senior,” the voice said. “I can see you.” The voice turned anxious. “Are you all right, Juan?” The question was punctuated by the sharp crack of a rifle. “I tol’ you not to reach, senior. You, senior-in-the-pilohouse, put up your helm.”

There was another crack, and a bullet imbedded itself solidly in the wheelhouse door. Anderson unhunched his neck from his shoulders with a conscious effort.

Max cursed softly and whirled the spokes of the wheel. An automatic appeared in his right hand. He smashed the window glass in front of him with his gun butt, leaned far out, and in four shots knocked out the bowsprit and masthead lights. He reversed the gun again and crashed its butt into the light over the chart table. Charles shivered involuntarily as the darkness swept in upon them. From the corner of the wheelhouse in which he was crouched, Juan Sanchez' body was merely a long shadow on the planking. "Max—"

"Get on deck an' see what happened to Ted!" Max snarled.

Instinctively responding to the authoritative voice, Charles crept to the door and opened it cautiously. Nothing happened. On hands and knees he inched his way along the deck. His left hand descended upon something soft, and he barely restrained a yell. Staring down into half-distinguished still features, he could see a dark stain on the white T-shirt disclosed by the now still hands that had clawed open the coveralls.

Charles drew a deep breath.

Straightening up, he tried to think what to do. Ahead of him out on the water, but behind Max, he sensed rather than saw the dark bulk of something moving toward them. A searchlight came on, glaringly, shifting at once from the bow to the wheelhouse, which it bracketed. A drumbeat rat-a-tat-tat assailed his ears, and he sank to the deck again. His hand encountered a wooden handle, and he clutched convulsively at what his fingers verified to be a boat hook. The sound of shattering glass brought his head up again, in time to see a line of tracers "walk" a fiery path through the wheelhouse. He stifled a scream as he watched quick puffs of dust rise from the back of Max's coveralls as the machinegun hemstitched his breadth from shoulder to shoulder. The boat yawed wildly as Max fell away from the wheel.

Charles sought frantically for saliva in a parched throat. On his knees, he could see another khaki-clad figure half-silhouetted against the searchlight of the boat drifting past them, an arm and shoulder through the sling supporting the machinegun. The two boats came together with a rasp of grinding wood, parted, then dipped toward each other again. Almost within arm's length of Charles, the man with the machinegun stepped up

on the railing of his own boat preparatory to jumping across to the deck of the *Araminta B.* Half out of his mind with fear at the thought of being found by the machinegunner, Charles rose and swung the boat hook in a sweeping arc.

The machinegunner, catching the movement from the corner of his eye, swung to confront it, but the boat hook caught him solidly in the chest. He staggered, tried desperately to recover his lost balance, then pitched over the rail between the two boats. His echoing scream changed timbre as the boats came together again, and the rattle of the machinegun as it sprayed the firmament from his finger-frozen-to-the-trigger position died out abruptly. All sound ceased except that of the heaving swell of the Atlantic. Charles Anderson stood splay-footed on the pitching deck and listened to his own sobbing breath.

The Coast Guard picked him up two hours after sunrise. He was rowed to the cutter and the lieutenant commander in charge.

"Three bodies," reported the young jg who conducted him. "One of them belongs on the derelict we picked up earlier. The shrimper's loaded with heavy-duty goods."

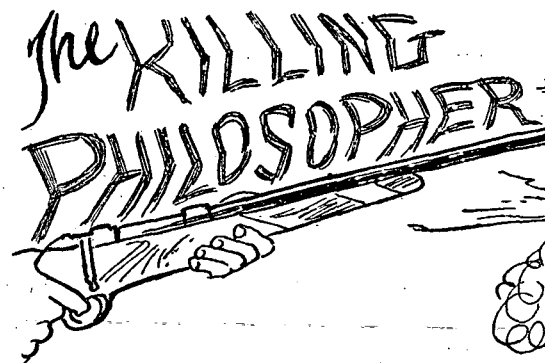
"We're sorry about the mixup at Saddle Bunch, Mr. Anderson," the lieutenant commander said efficiently. "It seems that your Mr. Fenton felt you were so rude to him that he didn't make the phone call until after he'd had his dinner." His weatherbeaten features expressed a lively curiosity as he studied Charles Anderson. "Now if you'll sit down, we'll make out the report."

Properly expurgated, yes, Charles Anderson reflected. The bank wouldn't care for the publicity of its assistant cashier killing a man, even in self-defense, but self-preservation is the first law of nature. If he lived to be seventy, the next thirty-five years would be borrowed. "I was lucky that they killed each other off," he began, and spoke of the details.

In time, he might even come to believe it.



Apparently contemporary philosophy is not exclusively of
"hippie" inception.



HE STOOD waiting in the doorway of the cabin and he seemed even to welcome us.

His eyes went over both Harry and me and he smiled. "Neat dark suits, conservative ties, black shoes. I expected as much."

"Would your name be James C. Wheeler?" I asked.

He nodded and still smiled.

Harry held up the wallet. "Did you lose this?"

"No," Wheeler said. "I did not lose the wallet. I intentionally left it beside the body."

Harry and I looked at each other.

"But come in," Wheeler invited.



We followed him inside. The cabin was clean and equipped only with basic furniture.

Wheeler reached for the coffee pot and removed the lid. "When did you find the body?"

"About noon," I said.

He spooned fresh coffee into the basket. "By the way, just out of curiosity, what was her name?"

"Carol Wisniewski," Harry said.

Wheeler shrugged. "Even the

name means nothing at all to me."

I picked up the rifle lying on the cot and pulled back the bolt. A spent cartridge popped out onto the floor. "So you wanted to be caught?"

"Of course," Wheeler said. He put the pot on the small stove and turned on the bottled gas. "I am now forty years old and I have lived, by choice, in this cabin for almost my entire adult life." He blew out the match. "Do you think it has been a dull life?"

Harry shrugged. "I wouldn't know. Maybe you hunt and fish."

Wheeler shook his head. "No. I do not hunt and I do not fish. I indulge in the greatest adventure of all. I think."

He reached for his pipe and pouch. "I was just past twenty-one when my father died. He left me a small inheritance. Anyone else might have run through the money within a year or so, but I chose to come here. It has always been my natural predisposition to avoid the world. By living simply, I made the money last for almost twenty years. But now there is nothing left—nothing at all."

"What has that got to do with killing the girl?" I asked.

"Patience," Wheeler said. "And so I was faced with the prospect of having to go to work in order to live." He smiled broadly. "Oh, it

is not work itself that appalls me. It is the expenditure of time that the operation involves; time stolen from me and my thoughts. And one has only one lifetime, you know."

"Sure," Harry said. "She was fourteen years old."

Wheeler shrugged. "So finally I came up with the solution to my problem, the only solution. I would go to prison. There I would be fed and clothed, but above all, I would be given the freedom of time for speculative thought."

Harry had been examining the rifle. "You think that they won't make you work in jail?"

Wheeler smiled. "I have taken the time to investigate thoroughly your enlightened prison system. I will simply refuse to work. I know that no force or intimidation will be used against me. I will be placed in solitary."

"And you figure that a philosopher can do his thinking on bread and water?" I asked.

Wheeler lit his pipe. "As I said, I took the trouble to investigate. Solitary in this state means just that and nothing more. The meals served are identical to those given the other prisoners, and one is even allowed reading material." He smiled contentedly. "I think that I shall be supremely happy."

Harry put down the rifle. "You

wanted to go to prison so you shot somebody to get there? Just like that?"

He frowned. "No. Not just like that. I planned and researched before I acted, and then this morning I went down the path that winds to the lake and waited. I shot the first person to come by. It happened to be this Carol Wisniewski. But it could have been anyone."

There was silence and his eyes went over us. "Do you think I am insane?"

"I don't know," I said.

He glared. "No, I am not insane. On the contrary, I have reached the ultimate in sanity, and that is to realize that nothing is really important except one's own wishes, one's own desires, one's own life."

"So the life of Carol Wisniewski meant absolutely nothing to you?" I asked.

"Nothing," Wheeler said. "Nothing at all." He laughed sharply. "I see that you have no use for me. Perhaps you are thinking that, if nothing else, it could be arranged that I 'accidentally' fall down a number of times before I reach

the police station environment?"

Harry and I said nothing.

Wheeler pulled a folded piece of paper from a book on the table. "This is a copy of an affidavit from my doctor. It certifies that I am in the best of health and, specifically, that I do not suffer from any bruises, contusions, or broken bones. Would you care to examine it?"

Neither Harry nor I touched the paper.

His eyes went over the objects in the room. "There is really nothing material here that I will miss. In fact, I am rather looking forward to the new leisure required for pure thought. You might say that I am actually engaged in distilling human existence to the length of one book; perhaps even one essay; one sentence."

"Or one scream?" I asked.

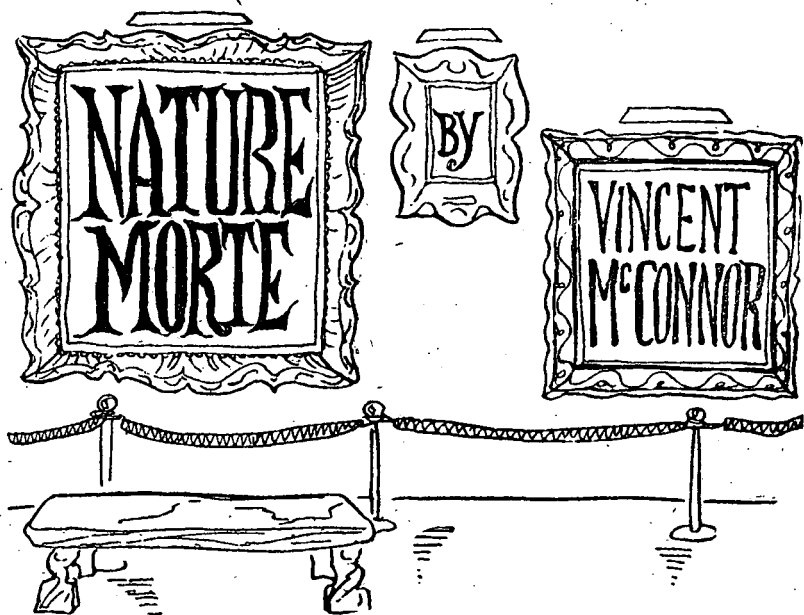
He seemed irritated. "We will not wait for the coffee. You may take me to your police station now."

My cousin, Harry Wisniewski, pulled the knife out of his pocket.

And I smiled. "Who the hell said we were cops?"



The closing of a door may be contiguous to a whisper—or resound with the revelations of a lifetime.



THE old man, Tourade, was a nuisance. There he was again, lurking in the shadows under the stone archway, waiting for him to pass on his way back from lunch. Now he was coming out into the bright sunlight with his ancient broom of twigs, pretending to sweep the sidewalk that he had cleaned earlier. His back was turned as though he had no idea

that anyone was approaching. At the far end of the square, the trees in the Place Dauphine were a soft green against the massive stone bulk of the Palais de Justice.

Should he look at the wretched painting today? Get it over, once and for all!

Jules Charmet glanced at his wristwatch. Only just past one-thirty, and he had left the usual

sign on his locked door, announcing that the Galerie Charmet would reopen at two o'clock. There would be no American tourists wandering through the Place Dauphine until after the lunch hour.

His own lunch had been brief—a plate of steamed mussels with a glass of white wine, followed by a perfect Camembert—at his customary table in the Petit Dauphin, surrounded by the usual representatives of the law from the Préfecture de Police, all of whom had their regular tables. The Petit Dauphin had once been the Maison Lavoisier but it had closed after the unfortunate death of its owner by poison. Six months had passed before it reopened under a new management. Preceding the restaurant, Charmet remembered, the premises had been occupied by an art dealer, Galerie de Vert Gallant, who had gone out of business because he did not handle the kind of paintings that appealed to the tourists who swarmed across the Ile de la Cité every summer.

This afternoon he would telephone Mrs. Woodson, the rich lady from Boston, who was considering the purchase of that unfortunate canvas he had been unable to get rid of in three years. It had been painted by an untalented young artist in the style of Utrillo,

and the American woman, plump and perspiring, had circled his gallery several times before she selected it from all the other paintings on display. That's how it was, nearly always, with these tourists. You could offer them a real bargain but they would show no interest unless they discovered something, usually in a dark corner, for themselves.

Tourade was turning slowly as Jules came closer. The old man would look up just before he reached him and give a performance, pretending surprise that he was passing.

Maybe he should look at that canvas today, put an end to it. Tourade had been after him for more than a year to inspect his treasure. At least once each month he waited for him like this.

The concierge looked up from his sweeping. "Monsieur Charmet! I did not see you. A thousand pardons! If I have swept dust into your eyes—"

"Not at all."

"You have enjoyed a good lunch?" His white beard moved up and down, in a chewing motion, as he spoke of food.

"A small businessman cannot afford the kind of lunch he would prefer these days. Prices are even higher than last year."

"It is a scandal, Monsieur. But

then with your excellent Galerie—”

“The tourists are not buying. They look, but they do not spend their money.”

“Ah, but this is only June. The season is just starting.” The ancient blue eyes became crafty. “I trust Monsieur has not forgotten that he promised to inspect a certain canvas which is in my possession? Tell me its true value?”

“Eh bien! I will look at it.”

“Splendid, Monsieur! When can I hope for such an honor?”

“Right now. This afternoon.”

“Pardon, Monsieur?” The rheumy eyes went blank as he tried to comprehend the words.

“I have another half hour before I must open my Galerie.”

“Certainly, Monsieur.” The old man turned back into the cool shadow under the archway. “You will forgive the appearance of my apartment? When one has lost his wife it is difficult to take care of a building such as this and also tend to the daily chores in one’s own living quarters,” he said, leading the way through the cobbled passage that ended in a small courtyard with a stone staircase to the upper floors.

Charmet had never been inside this building. During the twenty years since he opened his gallery on the Place Dauphine he had visited few of the nearby estab-

lishments because none of his business came from the neighborhood. He did know every concierge, such as old Tourade, by sight or because they spoke as he passed. They all knew, of course, that he was the owner of the Galerie Charmet, though none of them had ever set foot inside. The concierge of his own building was a ferocious old woman who spent most of her time observing the daily happenings in the Place Dauphine from behind her white lace curtains.

“Pardon, Monsieur.” Tourade opened a door in the passage beside the small spy window through which he could watch any person, tenant or stranger, who entered his courtyard. “Permit me to turn on a light.” He went ahead into the dim room.

Charmet followed, aware of the airless interior, wondering what he would find here. A monstrous daub, painted by some friend of the family, was what these treasures usually turned out to be. Tourade had said that somebody gave this canvas to his mother, which would mean it was painted many years ago because the old fellow must be in his late seventies. His own concierge had informed him, long ago, that Tourade had lived alone since the death of his wife during the Occupation.

Tourade snapped a switch and a small bulb flickered to life in a pink silk shade above a round table in the center of the room. The light shone down on unwashed plates from a recent meal. Several large flies prowled on the soiled table cloth.

"Forgive me, Monsieur. Dishes from last night's dinner. It is difficult when there is no woman in the house."

"Have you ever thought of retiring? Perhaps to the country?"

"Never! I've never had a day of sickness in my life! I could not survive away from Paris. I was born here—and I shall die here!"

"Where is this painting you've been telling me about?"

"It hangs above my bed. I will bring it in here." He hobbled toward an inner door. "Monsieur will please make himself comfortable."

Charmet sat, rather gingerly, on one of the plain wooden chairs as the old man disappeared into the other room. The furniture looked like castoffs, probably discarded by former tenants. In one corner was an ancient sink beside a small stove where the old man did his cooking. More dirty dishes were piled in the sink.

"Here we are, Monsieur!" Tourade edged through the door, crab-like, with a large, unframed canvas

under his arm, its back toward Charmet. "I am grateful to Monsieur for taking the time . . ."

Jules saw that the back of the canvas was faded with age. At least it was old! That was promising.

"You will tell me, Monsieur, what it is worth?" The old rascal's eyes gleamed with anticipation. "What I could hope to get if I sold it?"

"Of course!" He leaned forward. "But I must see it first."

"D'accord." Tourade turned the canvas around.

Nature morte! A still life of fruit arranged on a table. Apples and pears . . . Mon Dieu! It was a Cézanne! The glowing colors were like precious jewels. He mustn't let Tourade see his reaction, give no sign of what he had found. The familiar signature was painted in a corner, barely visible, with the date 1891.

"Eh bien, Monsieur?" Tourade's beard was quivering with impatience. "What is your opinion of its value?"

"Please! I must study this."

"Certainly." The old man propped the canvas on a chair under the light.

"It is fairly interesting . . ."

What could he say? If this were an authentic Cézanne it could be worth a fortune! He must hide



his excitement, pretend that the painting was worth no more than a few hundred francs; and, somehow, he must get it away from the old man. Offer to buy it, get a bill of sale in case there might be trouble later.

"Monsieur can estimate its

worth?" Tourade asked anxiously.

"Only after I have examined it more closely. Permit me . . ." He reached for the canvas and lifted it from the chair. "Tell me, how long have you had this?"

"All my life, Monsieur. I remember it hanging in our parlor when

I was a boy. My mother worked for many of the artists in Montmartre. Near the end of the last century—”

“She posed as a model?”

“Mais non! Nothing like that, Monsieur. She cleaned their studios, cooked for them. This was given to her by one of her painters.”

“He painted it?” Maybe the old man knew that the artist was Cézanne.

“No, Monsieur. This had been painted by his friend. He did not like it, but my mother had admired it, so when she was about to be married he gave it to her for a wedding present. My sister, also, did not like it, so it came to me after my parents died. I have had it ever since.”

“Your sister is alive?” Charmet set the canvas back on the chair.

“Alas, Monsieur! She has been dead many years.”

“You have children?”

“My wife and I had a son but he was killed in the war.”

There would be no relatives to deal with! He would give Tourade a few hundred francs—not too many or the old nuisance would get suspicious—and the Cézanne would be his.

“You’ve no idea who painted this?”

“No, Monsieur. The name is

there but I have never been able to make it out. Only the date. 1891! Almost as old as I, Monsieur. Surely that must make it more valuable. To be of such an age . . .”

The old fellow, of course, had never heard of Cézanne! All those masterpieces in the Jeu de Paume, only a few streets away, were in another world from that of this ignorant petit bourgeois. He had, very likely, not ventured as far as the Place de la Concorde in years. Even if he walked past the Jeu de Paume, he would have no suspicion of the priceless treasures on exhibition inside. “You have shown this to some of your tenants upstairs?”

“Certainly not! They never come into my apartment.”

“Your friends?”

“Who has friends, Monsieur, in my business?” He leaned forward, facing him, above the canvas. “How much would you say it is worth?” A ribbon of saliva was trickling down his white beard. “How much?”

“Some dealer might give you a thousand francs.”

“A thousand? C’est bien! I had hoped that it might be worth five hundred. A thousand is twice as much. I am grateful to you, Monsieur.”

“In fact, I will give you the

thousand francs, myself, today."

"Oh, no, Monsieur! I would never permit—"

"But I assure you that I would be happy to pay you that amount."

He brought out his wallet. "I will sell it to one of those American tourists who come to my gallery. Make a small profit, of course; perhaps fifty francs."

"Impossible, Monsieur!"

"What do you mean?"

"This painting is not for sale. It will never be for sale. Not at any price."

The Galerie Charmet was silent that afternoon. Its door stood open onto the sunny Place Dauphine but its owner remained at his desk in the dark office at the rear. From the shadows he could observe every corner of the long velvet-walled gallery, unseen by any person who entered:

During the afternoon only one pair of tourists came in, blond Germans, obviously husband and wife. They marched around the walls, sneering at the decadent French art, but Charmet did not turn on the lights above the paintings.

Jules Charmet had a problem. Somehow he had to get possession of that Cézanne.

When he'd returned to his Galerie he had, immediately, checked

through a pile of recent newspaper clippings until he found a report of the last public auction of a Cézanne in London. An American dealer, representing some anonymous collector, had bought a Cézanne water color for the incredible sum of four hundred and sixty thousand dollars.

How much would that be in francs? He had to figure it out on a slip of paper. Nearly two and a half million francs! The pen fell from his suddenly icy fingers. That was more than he could hope to earn from his gallery the rest of his life!

To find a treasure in some attic or storeroom was the dream of every art dealer. In Paris it still happened nearly every year, though rarely anything as valuable as a Cézanne! If that water color had brought such a price in London, he should be able to sell this oil for twice as much. Maybe five million francs . . .

Charmet had, finally, offered the old man two thousand francs, but Tourade was adamant. The canvas was not for sale.

Charmet was so preoccupied that he forgot to telephone the American woman, Mrs. Woodson, to ask if she had finally reached a decision about that canvas she had been considering since last week.

The jewel colors of the Cézanne

burned like flames in his mind; an authentic masterpiece from the period, just before the turn of the century, when the great Impressionist had developed his final, mature style. To think it had been hanging there, in old Tourade's bedroom, all these years; glowing, unseen, in that dark room long before Charmet opened his gallery a few doors away.

Tourade could have destroyed it! He shivered at the thought. The old man, not suspecting its value, might have burned the canvas or sold it in the Flea Market for a few francs. It was as though the painting had been hanging there, all this time, waiting for him to find it. Yes! The Cézanne was, rightly, his.

What if he hadn't gone in to look at the canvas today? Now he shuddered. He had avoided seeing it for the past year. It was at least that long since the old nuisance had first stopped him and asked him to inspect his property. Somebody else might have looked at it, recognized what it was . . .

Charmet locked up his gallery earlier than usual and started to walk the few blocks to the small apartment on the other island, the Ile St. Louis, which he visited most afternoons between the hours of five and seven. His route was so familiar that he followed it au-

tomatically without noticing any of the familiar sights: a vanload of prisoners was being transported to the Préfecture de Police; tourists wandering like lost sheep, all heads turning in the same direction; black-robed nuns packed into a bus heading toward the cathedral. He passed the Marché aux Fleurs without stopping to select his usual bouquet of pink roses for Solange, hurried across the small bridge along the Quai d'Orleans, unaware of the barges moving along the Seine.

"You are early today!" Solange looked up from a novel as he removed his key from the lock and, closing the door, returned it to his pocket.

"There was no business." He dropped his hat on a chair and leaned down to kiss her perfumed lips.

"Fix yourself an apéritif." She put her book aside and rearranged the folds of her pink and white peignoir.

"I cannot stay this afternoon. Only a few minutes."

"Why not, chéri?"

"Madame Charmet is giving some sort of dinner party." He always spoke of his wife in this formal manner when he was with Solange.

"Another of her boring little affairs? Who has she invited this

time? The same boring group?"

"I did not ask." He shrugged, walked to the open windows. "But she is always annoyed if I do not arrive home in time to change."

"I went out this afternoon. Did a bit of shopping. Such enchanting new fashions! I told the vendeuse I may order a complete new summer wardrobe next week, particularly if we are going to Sweden in August."

Charmet turned back to stare at her as she talked. Sweden in August! Solange had become as demanding as his wife. Precious little difference! He had barely mentioned the possibility of a Scandinavian vacation and here she was taking it for granted. He was weary of her constant need for more money. This afternoon she looked older in the unflattering, slightly greenish light reflected from the sunlight on the trees outside. How old was she now? At least thirty-four, and putting on a little weight. She was wearing too much make-up again and her dyed blonde hair was arranged in a style that would be more attractive on a young girl.

He must be very careful not to mention his discovery of the Cézanne or give any hint that he might, soon, be a rich man. How would that affect their relationship? Solange would want more

money, of course; a larger and more fashionable apartment; probably her own car with an English chauffeur; furs, jewels . . .

No! He must not say a word about his coming good fortune. Now or at any other time, he must not tell his mistress or his wife.

Charmet watched Helene, across the salon, as she poured coffee into the delicate Limoges cups, studied her, without hearing a word she was saying to those bores gathered around her. His wife, unlike his mistress, had kept her figure. In spite of bearing two children, she was thinner now than when he had married her. She was, also, colder and more arrogant. The elegance which he had so admired when they were fellow students at the Sorbonne had now hardened into a domineering brilliance that had driven their son and daughter away from them, long ago, to establish their own apartments.

Helene, in contrast to Solange, was strikingly dark. Tonight she was wearing a green and silver dinner gown. Her long neck and the glossy coronet of purple-black hair gave her a curious Egyptian look.

He detested her and both his children, who very likely hated him quite as much as they loathed

their mother. He also detested this mansion in the Faubourg St. Germain which Helene had inherited from her father. It was like a museum, formal and uncomfortable, crammed with family heirlooms.

No, he would certainly not tell Helene about his stroke of luck. If she suspected, she would immediately arrange for permission from the authorities to restore a wing of the mansion which was closed because they had never been able to afford the extensive repairs to make it habitable. She would squander all the money he would get from the Cézanne if he gave her a chance.

For once in his life he was going to do the right thing—for himself. Whatever he decided to do with those five million francs, he would not mention anything to his wife or his mistress—but first he must get possession of that painting.

Charmet sat at his desk, day after day, at the rear of the gallery, trying to work out a plan by which he could take the Cézanne away from Tourade. There was absolutely no way to do it legally, no chance of tricking the old nuisance into turning it over to him.

He no longer switched on the lights when tourists came in to look at the paintings in his gallery. When they asked about prices

he was rude to them. Mrs. Woodson telephoned to say that she had decided to buy that painting if he would lower the price just a little, and Charmet told her that the canvas had been sold to somebody else. When she tried to protest, he banged the phone down.

That was the afternoon he made his decision. As long as Tourade was alive he would never be able to get his hands on the Cézanne. There was only one way to possess the painting. He must kill Tourade!

Yes, but he must do it in such a way that no suspicion would point to himself. He would arrange the old man's death so that it would seem to be from a natural cause, so there would be no investigation, no police prying and asking questions. No one knew that the Cézanne existed. He would simply remove it from the wall and carry it the short distance to his gallery where he would hide it among the canvases in his store-room. The deed must be done at night when no one, including his own concierge, would notice him slipping in and out.

Now, he avoided Tourade. No one must suspect they even knew each other. Most days, on his way to and from lunch, Charmet walked on the other side of the Place Dauphine but several times

he forgot and the old man bowed up and down in greeting. Char-met nodded briefly, and hurried past.

Step by step, he planned how to get rid of the old nuisance. It occupied his thoughts every hour of the day and kept him awake at night. Solange complained that he always seemed to be thinking of something else whenever they were together. His wife, on the other hand, noticed nothing. They were, already, so estranged that his increased preoccupation went unobserved.

He realized that Helene didn't really care what he did, and neither did his mistress. This brought him to another decision.

He would leave them, both of them. When he sold the Cézanne he would deposit all that money in a Swiss bank, in one of those numbered accounts nobody could trace. In Zurich he would arrange a new identity for himself, change his appearance, and buy another passport. There were places one could do that for money, and he would have five million francs. With a new name and changed appearance, he would go to South America or the United States; open a small gallery, perhaps, so he would not be bored, and find himself a charming girl.

But how would he get rid of

Tourade? Kill him, of course, but in such a way that there could be no suspicion of murder.

He continued to lunch, every day, at the Petit Dauphin. It amused him to sit there and plan his murder as he eavesdropped on conversations from nearby tables. One day he overheard a fascinating conversation. Two detectives, in their thirties, were discussing murder.

"... and it is impossible," one was saying, as he investigated the number of scallops in his Coquilles St. Jacques, "to determine whether it is murder or suicide when sleeping pills are involved."

"C'est vrai!" The other detective was dissecting a trout. "I have always claimed that there are dozens of murders in Paris every year which are dismissed as suicides. Who is to say that the victim did not take his own life? There is no evidence of murder. Only a small bottle of pills which, in these times, can be found in every household."

Sleeping pills! That was how he would kill the old nuisance!

Later that afternoon he planned exactly how it should be done. He must not take any of the blue pills which he kept in a plastic box in his desk. Instead, he would remove several of the bright yellow pills from the crystal vial which Solange

always had in her crowded medicine cabinet, and he would take some white ones from his wife's antique silver pill box which she kept on her bed table beside the water thermos. He knew nothing about such things, but two kinds of pills, mixed together in brandy, would surely confuse the police if they became suspicious about Tourade's death—and the pills could not be traced to him.

He got them that same evening, the yellow and the white pills. He placed them together in an old match box which he kept in his pocket until he reached the gallery next morning, then pushed the small box to the back of a drawer in his desk.

That morning he had an appointment to look at paintings in an artist's studio in Montmartre. Driving back to the gallery, he purchased a bottle of brandy in a shop near Pigalle where he was unknown. He selected an excellent brandy so the old man would be certain to want a second glass. He placed the brandy in the drawer with the box of pills, then went to the Petit Dauphin for lunch.

There was no sign of Tourade as he passed; probably busy at some chore for one of his tenants. Sometimes several days would pass and he would not glimpse the old man.

At lunch Charmet decided he would carry out his plan the following night. Tomorrow he must remember to take those old gloves from his car and wear them when he saw Tourade, to avoid leaving fingerprints. That night he did not sleep but went over his plan again and again. He was completely confident that it would work.

The next morning a stupid Englishman came into the gallery and asked questions about several of the paintings. The man, quite obviously, had no intention of buying anything but was killing time before lunch.

His own lunch was without incident, with no sign of Tourade as he walked to and from the Petit Dauphin. At the end of the day he spent an hour with Solange. This time he remembered to bring roses but his mistress was irritable. The weather was too warm, and her new wardrobe was requiring more fittings than she had anticipated. He realized, as he listened to her complaints, that he would be glad to see the last of Solange.

His wife, at dinner, was busy with plans for a weekend in the country with some of her boring friends. He agreed to accompany her because he must continue to live his daily life as though nothing extraordinary had taken place.

He would have to go on with his miserable existence until the Cézanne was sold, probably in one of the big auctions, and he could deposit the money in Switzerland. Then, very suddenly, Jules Charmet would disappear.

After dinner he went up to his room and stretched out on the bed.

Helene's bedroom was across the wide hall. Usually it was an hour before she got to sleep. Before the hour was over he changed into a gray shirt, dark gray suit, black tie, then switched off the lights and silently crossed the hall to Helene's room. The door opened soundlessly and he went in, moving carefully across the thick carpet to her bed. In the faint light from a night lamp he could see the cream glistening on her face, the grotesque mask that covered her eyes, the plastic plugs in both ears. Disgusting! And she was snoring, her lips moving in and out like a fish.

Helene would give him an alibi if he needed one. She would say that he was asleep across the hall. He turned and left as silently as he had entered.

The great wooden door under the stone archway was closed and locked. Charmet glanced up and down the Place Dauphine. No one was in sight; lighted windows

were in several of the upper floors.

He pressed the button that would sound a bell near Tourade's bed, pushed it a second time, certain that the old man would be asleep. Then he grasped the handle of the small inner door and, the instant the lock was released, pushed the door open, stepped inside, into the cobbled passage, and shut the door behind him. Moving quickly now, he hurried to the end of the passage and looked up at the rows of windows overlooking the courtyard: no lights; everyone was asleep.

Charmet turned back toward Tourade's door as a light glowed through the small spy window. He must remember to close the curtain over that so nobody would be able to see what was happening inside. He knocked, softly, on the door.

"Who's there?" Tourade's voice came from inside.

Charmet did not answer but, taking the brandy bottle from his pocket, knocked again.

The door opened, and Tourade stood there, clutching his robe, silhouetted against the light. "What do you want? It's after two o'clock . . . Ah, Monsieur Charmet!"

"I was working late at the Galerie and I thought, perhaps, you might join me for a drink before I go home." He held up the

brandy bottle. "Have a glass of brandy and talk about your painting again . . ."

"Come in, Monsieur. Come in." Tourade stepped back and, as Charmet followed, closed the door.

He set the brandy bottle on the round table. "I told one of my clients about your canvas and he is willing to buy it."

"That canvas is not for sale, Monsieur. As long as I live, I will not sell it." As he talked he pulled the curtain over the spy window. "Not every man has a thousand francs hanging above his bed. It helps me to sleep nights."

"Some glasses?"

"Certainly, Monsieur." He reached down two wine glasses from a shelf.

"Promise me one thing," Charmet said, opening the bottle as the old man placed the glasses on the table. "If you ever do decide to part with that canvas, you will permit me to sell it for you."

"I will, Monsieur. I give you my word. Please sit down."

Charmet sat on one of the hard wooden chairs and poured both glasses full of brandy. There was no trace of the sleeping pills that he had dissolved in a cup of brandy, earlier, and poured back into the bottle.

Tourade sat across the table from him and, lips smacking

greedily, reached for his glass. He lifted it in salute. "A votre santé, Monsieur!"

"Votre santé!" He raised his glass and pretended to drink as he watched the old man toss off the brandy.

"That is good, Monsieur. An excellent brandy . . ." His eyes held on the bottle.

Charmet kept his hand around his glass, as though to warm the brandy, hiding the fact that he had not tasted it. "Pour yourself another, mon ami."

"Merci, Monsieur." The old man snatched up the bottle and gave himself a larger drink than the first. Again he downed it with two swallows.

Charmet observed him more closely now. Apparently the pills had not changed the taste of the brandy. The old man gave no indication that he noticed anything suspicious. He was licking a drop of brandy that had dribbled from his lower lip onto his beard. Once again, he was eyeing the bottle.

"Have another, mon ami."

"Merci, Monsieur." The blue-veined hand reached out for the bottle. "It is good to sit like this with a friend." He poured another large drink and drained his glass. "I have had a hard life, Monsieur. All work. No time for friendship. But you are a true friend to have

told me, as you did, the value of my painting. Another man would have said it is worth only twenty francs and would have tried to buy it from me at that price."

Was the old fellow being sarcastic? Did he suspect . . .

"But you, Monsieur, told me . . . that it might . . . be worth a thousand francs . . . twice as much . . . I had dared . . . hope . . ."

Was his speech thickening, or did he imagine it? The ancient eyes seemed to be closing slightly.

" . . . and tonight . . . you come here . . . have drink . . . with me . . ." The lizard lids had shut over his eyes and the old man suddenly leaned forward to collapse on the table.

Charmet immediately brought out the gloves from his pocket, put them on, carried both glasses to the sink, emptied his untouched brandy down the drain, then washed them carefully. After drying both glasses on a soiled towel, he placed them back on the shelf, wiped his damp gloves on the dishtowel, let the faucet run to clean out the sink.

Then he went into the bedroom. It was dark but he could see the Cézanne hanging above the bed. He lifted it down and carried it into the other room where he propped it carefully against a chair.

What else? There was nothing

he had touched, no surface to be cleaned of fingerprints. The brandy bottle! He picked it up, stoppered it, slipped it into his pocket.



The old man was breathing heavily, making a rasping sound that seemed to echo through the room. How long would it take him to die? He wasn't going to wait around to find out.

Was there anything that might seem suspicious to the police? His chair! That could look as though someone had been sitting at the table with the old man. Charmet set it against the wall.

He picked up the Cézanne and snapped off the light. Then, in the darkness, he pulled back the curtain from the spy window. There was no light from the outside passage, and in the darkness the old man's breathing seemed even louder.

Charmet crossed to the door, opened it, then stepped out into

the cobbled passage. No sound came from the courtyard or from the street. Closing the door, he headed through the passage. There was no sound of any kind. He opened the small inner door and, rubbing the metal handle between his gloved fingers, pulled it shut behind him. If his fingerprints were on the bell button, a dozen other fingers would obliterate it before the old man's body was discovered.

Hesitating in the deep shadow of the archway, Jules checked both ends of the Place Dauphine. No one was in sight, and the upstairs windows were dark now. Keeping close to the buildings, he headed back toward his gallery. Another ten minutes and he would slip into his car which was parked on the Right Bank, and start for home. In half an hour, at most, he would be in bed.

As he unlocked the door of his gallery he heard distant bells sounding the hour: three o'clock; he had pulled it off.

The Place Dauphine was peaceful in the bright sunlight. Charmet walked back and forth through the dim gallery, from his office to the front window where he could watch the street, unobserved, from a place of vantage behind the velvet curtains.

It was late morning before the young gendarme came hurrying from the direction of the Préfecture and went under the archway into Tourade's building. From his brisk stride, it was apparent that someone had telephoned to report that the concierge did not answer his door, but it was another ten minutes before he heard a woman's voice screaming. So they had gotten the door open and found the body. It was still another half hour before a car drove up and two men, obviously detectives, got out and went inside.

Charmet lunched, as usual, at the Petit Dauphin. His waiter told him what had happened across the square. The concierge, old Tourade, had died in the night. They said it was his heart.

Jules ate a large lunch, with appetite.

When he returned to his gallery he did not look at the Cézanne. He had done that first thing in the morning, but he would not again pull it out from the rack of paintings in the storeroom until he was ready to put it up for sale at one of the big auctions. He would say that a client wished to sell it from his private collection.

Stationed once again at the window, he saw that a kind of ambulance was parked in the archway to Tourade's building. They must

be getting ready to take the old man's body away. No point in watching that; he went back to his office and relaxed at his desk.

Everything was in order. He had forgotten only one thing last night, the bottle of brandy with the rest of its deadly mixture. In his excitement he had left it on his desk where he found it in the morning, but he'd poured its contents down the washbowl behind the screen in his office, rinsed out the bottle and tucked it into a box of old bottles that his own concierge had already given to the man who collected such trash.

Another tourist was coming into his gallery. In no mood to explain paintings at such a time, Charmet got to his feet and circled the desk, into the silent gallery. The man was fanning himself with his hat. Heavyset with a florid complexion, he didn't look like an American tourist, but more like a French businessman, maybe hunting for a present to give his wife.

Charmet bowed. "Monsieur?"

"You are the owner?" The man was taking out his wallet.

"Jules Charmet, at your service."

"Chief Inspector Damiot." He flipped open his wallet. "Police Judiciaire."

"What's that?" Jules was so startled by the words that he didn't look at the man's credentials.

"I believe you know this concierge, up the street, who was found dead?"

"I heard about that at lunch. Old Tourade, wasn't it? Most unfortunate."

"You know him, Monsieur?"

"We all knew him, I suppose. Everybody in the Place Dauphine."

"Had you ever talked with him?"

"Nothing more than a few words about the weather. I would pass when he was sweeping the sidewalk. The waiter at the Petit Dauphin said it was his heart."

"I will not know that until after the autopsy."

"Autopsy?"

"There is always an autopsy when someone is found like this, unless there is a medical record; but according to the tenants of his building, this Tourade never had a day's sickness."

"Perhaps it was suicide."

"Why do you say that?"

"No reason. I only thought, if it was not his heart, it might be something like that."

"Suicide is out of the question."

"Out of the question?"

"There was no medicine of any kind in the old man's living quarters. If it were suicide, there would be an empty pill bottle, something of that sort."

"Perhaps sleeping pills?"

"A concierge never takes a sleeping pill. He must be a light sleeper, alert every hour of the night, to admit his tenants after the front door is locked. No, it could not be sleeping pills." The detective glanced around the gallery. "The old man had a painting . . ."

"Painting?"

"A large canvas that hung above his bed. It is no longer there." The detective turned to look at him again. "But there is a mark on the wall where the painting has been hanging for many years. We have taken the measurements. Had you ever seen this painting, Monsieur?"

"Never." What the devil was he getting at?

"We found a note in the old man's apartment . . ."

"A suicide note?"

"Nothing like that. Tourade wrote this several weeks ago. It is a bequest to you, Monsieur. He wrote that, in the event of his death, this painting was to become the property of—I quote his words—his kind friend, Monsieur Jules Charmet, proprietor of the Galerie Charmet. He signed the note so

it is quite legal, I should think. But the painting is gone, Monsieur! I thought, perhaps, the old man might have told you what he did with it."

"Certainly not. I had no idea he owned any painting."

"Perhaps someone has stolen it. The note described it as an unframed oil painting, a still life of fruit—nature morte—worth a thousand francs." He turned back toward the entrance door. "We will find out what happened to it, Monsieur, after we have learned the cause of the old man's death. Someone may have taken the painting last night after the old man died."

"Why would you think that?"

"Because the light was out in his apartment. Anyone suffering with a heart seizure does not get up to turn off the light." The detective opened the door without looking back. "Good day, Monsieur Charmet."

Stepping out into the sunshine, he closed the door behind him, but Jules Charmet heard the sound of another door closing—far away—a cell door.



Malevolence is occasionally overcome by some, overtaken by others.

THE HOUSE ON

DAMN STREET



By
Henry Slesar

THIS year's man to hate is Matt Shaver, they said in Hollywood; one more in a series of hot-eyed little dynamos come out of the east to make movies, money, and enemies in Southern California. Matt

Shaver had made them all, and had the walnut door to prove it. The door said EXECUTIVE PRODUCER and Matt never passed it without bestowing a two-finger kiss on the title, the way orthodox Jews kiss the mezuzahs in their doorways. This was Charm, and always got him a laugh. Nobody laughed behind the door, not curvy Edie his secretary, who thought he was proposing marriage that night in the Red Flamingo Motel and found it was only a job proposition; and not Ken Schneider, his assistant producer, who loathed him with disarming openness; and not Benny, big, shambling Benny with his dog's eyes and pendulous lip; Matt's driver, butler, bodyguard, valet, and kicking-place.

Typical day: drive into studio at ten o'clock, meet v.p. Sam Lister in front of A Building. Walk down corridor, telling Sam of new project (production budget: two million), kiss title on door, Sam laughs, walk inside. Morning, Edie (Good morning, you stinker, where were you last night?). Morning, Ken (Grunt). Benny, you ape, where's my coffee? Down to business. Get me Dubbing Room. Get me Bill Waldon. Where's the stuff from the Art Department? Where's revised script? Get that phone, Edie. Benny! (kicking off

shoe) Shine that little mother, I must have stepped in something. Edie, what time's my appointment? On phone: Hello, sweetheart, I love you to pieces. Off phone: You creep! Benny! (kicking off other shoe) Might as well shine this one, too, it's a set. Edie! Call Doc Roseman, tell him I won't be able to—no, skip it, I missed two sessions already.

Matt Shaver at noon. Benny driving him to the analyst, lumpy hands gentle on the silken wheel.

"Yeah, things have changed," Matt said. "Right, Benny? You remember that lousy job of yours in the knitting mill?"

"I remember," Benny said.

"What were they paying you, Benny?"

"Buck-forty an hour, when I got to work the big machine."

"You remember that," Matt Shaver said coolly. "You never forget that buck-forty, Benny."

"Yes, sir," Benny said.

"Yes sir is right," Matt said.

Then peace. Stretched out with a sigh on Dr. Roseman's leather sofa, quiet contemplation of smoke drifting to the ceiling of the analyst's office. My sixty dollar cigarette, Matt called it. And Roseman, Moses in a gray worsted suit, soft-voiced and understanding.

"No," Roseman said, clearing his throat gently. "We don't leave

poverty behind by getting money, we can still feel poor with a fat wallet. The mind is a haunted house."

"A house," Matt said bitterly. "You know, lately I've been thinking about the house we used to live in. We're getting ready to shoot this picture now, it's a slum story, and every time I read the script I get the whimsams because it makes me think of that house on Damn Street. That wasn't its real name, it was Van Damme Street in Brooklyn, right at the end of the trolley line near Canarsie. I grew up in that house, that lousy house; it burned down long ago but I wish I could burn it down all over again. That house was so rotten it made people rotten. I didn't get germs when I was a kid, I got termites. You couldn't open a window in the place without risking a hernia, the floors were like the Crazy House in Coney Island, the roaches had a population explosion and were lying around dead from hunger. It was worse for me, little puny me, little four-eyed shrimp like me. Sixty-pound weakling. Hiding in the cellar reading *Ivanhoe*, afraid of the street, afraid of the kids on the block, afraid of Cheech . . ."

"Cheech?"

"Cheech," Matt Shaver said, clutching the couch like the sides

of a raft. "He was my whole stinking world rolled up in one package. A strutting side of beef, a pair of fists like two rocks, old baseball stuck in his trouser pocket, a wad of gum in his cheek. He smelled the fear on me, like a dog, and it drove him crazy. His day wasn't complete without beating me up; he used to ambush me after school, he used to bombard me with snowballs in winter, make me eat dirt in spring. Cheech, Cheech," Matt said, thumping the sofa with his palms, "that's what Damn Street was, Cheech. Him and that stinking house . . ."

The cigarette sputtered, and Matt stubbed it in the ashtray. He looked at the black stump and the idea came. "Hey."

"What is it?"

"The house," Matt said. "I told you about this picture we're shooting, this slum story. That's what made me think of it again, that's what's been giving me nightmares."

"So?" Roseman said.

"We were going to build a set on the back lot, just for the picture, a house like that. What do you think, Doc? Kill two birds. Relive the trauma, isn't that the idea? What if I built the old house, Doc, the way it was, just the way it was?"

"I don't follow you."



Matt sat up. "It'll do me good, don't you think? Look the past in the face? That's what analysis is all 'bout, am I right? So what if I put that house together again. I got some old pictures of the place my father took, and I can remember the rest. Boy, can I remember! You think it's a good idea?"

Roseman smiled. "It's an expensive kind of therapy. Frankly, I don't know what you'll get out of it."

"So I'll get a set out of it! That

at least, Doc. Tell me it's a good idea."

"Why do you need someone to tell you?"

Matt took off his glasses, and polished the thick lenses with his handkerchief. Without them, his small face looked puckered and tired.

"You're right," he said. "I don't need anybody."

But he asked Ken Schneider, and Ken said why not? Then he

told his idea to Edie over cocktails at Chasen's, and Edie got wetly sentimental listening to the story of his unhappy childhood. He even told Benny what he was going to do, and Benny spent the night digging for the old photographs in Matt's attic. The next day he called Royard Johnson, the set designer, and explained his notion with such lip-licking enthusiasm that Johnson was impressed and promised him sketches in an unheard-of two days. Bill Waldon, the director of the movie, wasn't as hot on the idea—he was still holding out for location shooting—but Matt won him over with alternating charm and bluster.

He saw the sketches derived from the amateur photographs, and they were all wrong, it wasn't the house on Damn Street at all. He swore at Johnson, who muttered about "interpretation" and then brought in Si Goldman from the Art Department who made a new sketch on the spot from Matt's murky description. The results were no more satisfactory, and he went home that night in a stage of badly-controlled anger; he took it out on Benny. The next morning, Goldman walked in with an armful of house pictures culled from the stock files, and with painstaking thoroughness (sandwiches brought in at noon

by Benny, you cretin, you forgot the mustard) Matt pieced together the house he remembered, every window, slat, beam, shingle, doorway, stud, floorboard of the house on Damn Street. This time, Goldman's final sketch of the day was right, it was so right it was eerie, it was the gloomy, gibbous, squalid woodframe monster of his childhood.

There was only one question in Matt's mouth after that. "When?" A thousand and one decisions had to be made in the production of the new feature, but Matt passed them on to Ken Schneider. All he wanted to know was, "When?" He called Royard Johnson every day. He asked Edie to run over to the lot on any pretext to see their progress. He never visited the set himself, he wanted to see the house, but only when it was completed. He couldn't sleep thinking about it. Liquor couldn't get him drunk. Curvy Edie kept her own company.

It took three weeks. It was only a shell of a structure, but it was built to exacting specifications; the original had probably been thrown together in less time. Johnson telephoned Matt's office late on a Thursday afternoon and said it was done, finished, thanks be, all they had to do was move the tools and junk out and he could have

a look. "When?" said Matt. They made the appointment for seven.

He asked Ken and Edie to come along. He was in the pleasantest of moods. He laughed and joked with them about it, and the fixed grin on his sweaty face, the airy gestures of his shaking hands, made them both uncomfortable, but they said sure, why not, and they walked him over to the set.

There was a red sun with its rim touching the top of the Hollywood Hills when they reached the back lot. Johnson was waiting for them, looking pleased with himself.

"Let me tell you," he grinned, "it's terrific, it's a crummy masterpiece. Waldon took one look and flipped for it, he said it's better than the real thing."

"We'll see," Matt said. "I'll tell you how real it is, I'm the world's greatest expert."

Then the house was looming in front of them, and Matt stopped.

The building had a lurching look, a crouching, swayback, ominous look. Its scabrous paint was like a hideous skin disease on a face formed by a door and two bleak-eyed windows. There was a front porch with broken columns, and weeds were growing through the cracks in the floorboards. In the waning light, it had a personality of menace; Edie winced

when she saw it, and even Ken Schneider was affected.

But Matt; what it did to Matt.

He was rooted where he had halted. His figure was frozen awkwardly, off balance; he breathed through an open mouth. He stared at the house the way a cataleptic stares at nothing.

"Matt," Johnson said, "does it fill the bill, Matt?"

"Look at him," Ken said dryly. "Can't you tell?"

"Matt," Edie said.

He didn't answer. He walked toward the house with leaden steps. Johnson went after him, hungry for praise.

"Is it right, Matt? Is it the house you remember?"

He stopped in front of the porch railing.

"Matt, what do you say? Listen, a lot of guys knocked themselves out to make it right. You could at least—"

Matt whirled on him, and the thick lenses of his glasses turned blood-red with the sun's reflection; Johnson took it for anger, but Matt's answer was hushed.

"It's the same lousy house," he said. "Just like it was, so help me. In ten seconds I'm going to bust out crying—"

"Gee, Matt—"

"So do me a favor, huh? Do me a favor, Roy."

"Sure, anything. Just name it."

"Get out of here. Take Edie and Ken with you. Will you do that for me?"

"Of course, Matt, whatever you say."

He walked back to the others and told them. Ken shrugged, but Edie looked worried. She went to Matt and started to say something. This time, the anger behind the glasses was real.

"I said I want to be left alone! Now will you get the hell out of here and leave me alone?"

"But what about dinner? We were going to meet the Waldons and—"

"Leave me alone, Edie!"

She stiffened, and turned on her heel. Then she joined Johnson and Ken in the slow walk to A Building. She looked back once, and Matt was still in front of the porch steps, his shadow diminishing in the oncoming night.

He was alone with it.

He shut his eyes, opened them, and the house was still there.

"Oh, you worthless house," he whispered. "You miserable, rotten house. I never thought I'd see you again . . ."

He put his fingers around a porch column, throttling it until his hand hurt.

"You stinking trap. You had

to go and burn down. I ought to kick you in. I ought to burn you down again!"

It was getting dark now, sun behind the hills. Night was hiding the house from sight. He looked around, and saw the klieglight wires trailing into the power plant. He fumbled around until he found the switch, and then turned the bright tunnel of light on the building, deepening its ugliness with hard shadows.

"Just like it was," he muttered. "Just like it was on Damn Street so many years . . ."

A wind came out of nowhere, and made him shiver.

He put his foot on the first rickety step of the porch, and mounted the others slowly. It felt like the old house, it squeaked like the old house.

He went to the door, and touched it with his fingertips. It gave way, and swung back on the hinges.

He put his hand on the knob, and pushed it open.

What had he expected? The gloomy old hallway, the smell of grease and boiled milk and uncavated dust? The tattered hooked rug on the floor, the calcimined walls, the cracked ceiling? His mother's voice, bawling out complaints about his late homecoming? Or his father's raucous pro-

tests as he crouched by the old Philco trying to hear the funny men on the radio while he drank his beer? The expectation was foolish. He was in the empty core of the structure, the inside of the shell, hollow and without the power of nostalgia.

He found that he was trembling all over now, and as a sign of his mastery over the bad memories he reached for a cigarette and lit it. He looked toward the window, out onto the porch, and puffed long columns of smoke.

Then he heard the *thump-pop*, *thump-pop*, *thump-pop* sound, and the cigarette fell from his fingers.

Thump-pop. Thump-pop.

He listened, trying to put a name to the sound.

Thump-pop, against the side of the house.

He walked toward the window.

Thump, against the side of the house, the sound of a rubber ball thudding against the side of the house, *pop*, hitting the porch floor and bouncing up again, into the hands of who?

"Hey, four-eyes!"

A wind rushed past his ears, and stung at his eyes.

"Four-eyes! Come on out!"

Thump-pop. "Come on out, you little stinker!"

He rushed to the window, and there was Cheech, rubbing up the

ball in his meaty fists, sneering as he tossed it against the siding, catching it easily as it rebounded off the porch. His dirty shirttails were hanging out of his ragged pants, a wad of gum rounded his cheek.

"What do you say, four-eyes? Where'd you go after school? I couldn't find you."

Matt shook his head, shook his head and mumbled, and Cheech laughed.

"What's the matter, four-eyes, didncha think I'd be waiting? You think I'm afraid of your old lady? Go on, call your old lady!"

He turned away from the vision and looked back into the comforting reality of the shell. I'm crazy, he thought, crazier than Roseman knows . . .

"Come on out, I got something for you! I got a punch in the nose! I got a kick in the pants! Come on out and get what's coming to you!"

"No!" Matt Shaver screamed.

"You better come out! I'll come in and get you, four-eyes!"

"Get away from here!" Matt Shaver screamed into the hollow of the building.

"Four-eyes! Four-eyes! Little mama's boy!"

He looked down at himself. He saw the tips of his polished brogans, the stretch of his pants legs. He looked at his hands.

"What am I afraid of?" he whispered. "It's only a kid! I'm a grown man!"

"Four-eyes!"

He went to the door and flung it open. He expected the vision to disappear, vanish with confrontation, but Cheech was still there, tossing the ball casually, ambling toward him.

"You get out of here!" Matt said hoarsely. "You get out of here, kid, you don't belong here!"

"Who says so? Who says so, four-eyes, you? This is Cheech you're talking to, remember?"

"I'm a grown man! You can't talk to me that way, Cheech, you hear me?"

The boy laughed again, uproariously, clapping his hands on the worn knees of his trousers. "You punk! You little punk! I'll smear the place with you!"

He came closer, and Matt backed away.

"Come on," Cheech said coaxingly. "Come on and fight for a change, four-eyes, let's see what you're made of. Come on, you—"

"Don't come near me!"

Cheech was still tossing the ball. Then he dropped it, and swung his fist at Matt's nose; but Matt was taller now, and the punch landed high on his chest. He tried to catch the boy's wrist, but his arms were weighted and wouldn't

leave his side. He staggered backward and Cheech hit him again, in the stomach. He said *oof!* and Cheech giggled and caught his left arm and twisted.

"Let me go! Let me go!" Matt cried.

"Haha! Four-eyes wants me to let him go! Say please, four-eyes, say please with sugar on it—"

"Please, please!" Matt sobbed.

He went to his knees, and Cheech kicked him in the side. "Fight, four-eyes, why don't you fight? Whyncha call your mother, huh? Mama, Mama!" Cheech mimicked. "That bad boy's hurting me, Mama! Let's hear you say it, four-eyes!"

"Mama, Mama!" Matt Shaver wept. "Leave me alone, Cheech, I didn't do nothing to you! I'm wearing glasses, Cheech—"

"Oh, yeah?" Cheech whipped them off his head and looked at the tired, puckered face. "Hahaha! Look at four-eyes without his cheaters!"

"Give them back! Give them back, please!"

"Make me! Go on, let's see you make me!"

"Cheech!"

The boy dropped the glasses on the ground, and Matt reached for them. Cheech's heavy shoe trod on his hand, and he cried out in pain. Then Cheech's heel stomped

deliberately on the lenses, one at a time; and the sound of crunching glass made Matt cry all the harder.

"Crybaby, crybaby!" Cheech jeered. "Call your mama, crybaby, tell her Cheech did it, go on!"

"Mama, Mama!" Matt sobbed brokenly.

Cheech picked up his ball and tossed it in the air. Then he stuck it in his pocket and began to whistle. He walked away, slowly.

The wind came out of the hills again, and Matt Shaver lay on the ground and cried himself to sleep.

An electrician's helper found him the next morning, sprawled in front of the set with his shattered spectacles near his head. He treated him gruffly because he didn't know about the title on Matt Shaver's door, and Matt, numb with exposure, blind without his glasses, allowed himself to be treated like an unwelcome drunk all the way back to the main gate. Harry, the studio guard, recognized him and called his office; Ken and Edie came running to take him in tow. They brought him back to A Building

and Benny took over. He helped Matt into his office and made him comfortable on the couch; he got a blanket to cover his shivering body.

"Coffee," Matt said, chattering. "Get me coffee, Benny."

Benny was late with the coffee, and when he got there it was cold. Matt took one sip and his puckered face went livid; he hurled the brown liquid into Benny's surprised face.

"*You moron!*" he shrieked hysterically. "It's cold! Can't you do anything right, Cheech? What the hell do I pay you for?"

Benny mopped at his wet, puzzled face. "Cheech? Geez, boss, you ain't called me that in years. Not since we were kids on Damn Street . . ."

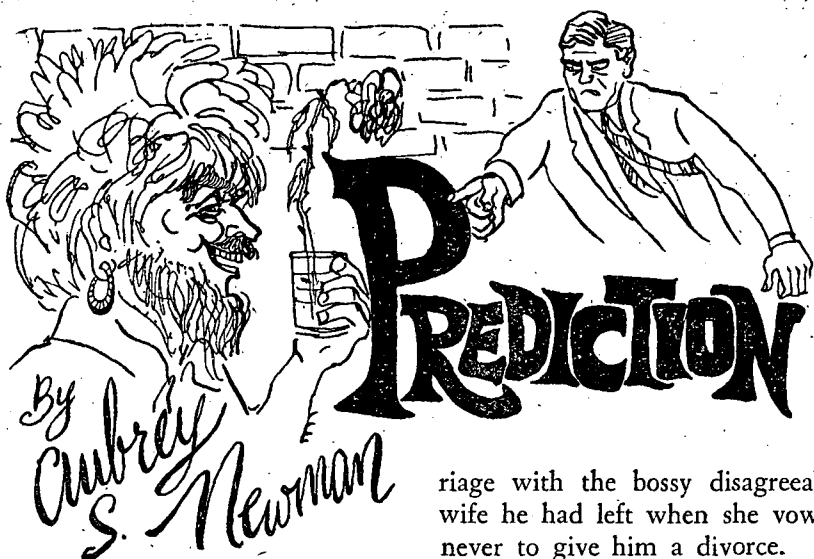
"If it wasn't for me, you'd be there right now, you know that? The same punk you always were! Now get me some *hot* coffee, understand?"

"Sure, boss," Benny said, and went to the door.

"Hurry up! And make it hot!" Matt Shaver yelled after him. "Hot, you moron! Hot! Hot! Hot!"



*'Tis said the wisest prophets make sure of the event first—but
patience is not a component of prudence.*



THE SUN turned red as it neared the tree tops along Selma River, and a rectangular beam of tinted light shone through a cellar window in the Hippie Heaven section of the city. When the pink shaft of light reached the bearded face on the iron cot, the man stirred. It was his silent alarm clock, because Grant Shank came alive at sundown, in this new world where nobody asked questions. Thus, nobody knew of his unhappy mar-

riage with the bossy disagreeable wife he had left when she vowed never to give him a divorce.

There was no alarm, however, to warn him this would be his last carefree day in Hippie Heaven—that pot and Nadine, who did not know he was married, would combine to make Detective Welker's prediction come true.

He sat up in the bunk, stretched, tossed off his pajama top and walked around the high steam boiler to the elementary but functionally adequate toilet facilities of his basement pad. Over the galvanized tin lavatory a large peeling gilt

framed mirror—a legacy from his predecessor—reflected Grant's living color image back to him, from the waist up.

The corded muscle torso of a Tarzan was revealed in minute detail. He clawed his fingers through the light brown beard with combing motions, then tousled his blond hair until it stood out in all directions with the proper halo effect. His light blue eyes, opaque and expressionless, focused on the gold loop earring that dangled in the mirror where the brown beard faded into his frizzled blond hair. The overall effect was that of a well muscled but immature pirate.

"Hello, you handsome devil!" Grant said aloud in his usual greeting to himself. Then he added, "Don't be impatient, Nadine, my exotic flower. I'll be at our usual place at the usual time."

Pulling on faded Levi's, frayed at the bottoms, he stuck his bare feet into scuffed loafers and slipped on a tail-out sport shirt of rainbow colors that showed signs of long unwashed wear. Now, dressed for dinner, he opened the can of pork and beans—warmed during the day over the boiler—cut a slice of bread, and poured a cup of instant coffee made with hot water from the lavatory tap.

His stomach satisfied, it was now time for a little soul solace. Behind

the boiler there was a maze of water and steam pipes, including a large diameter, main water pipe with a T in it. The extra outlet, closed with a hand valve, had been extended by a short length of pipe with a cap on its open end. Grant twisted the length of pipe until it came loose in his hand—and it proved to be full of cigarettes.

He smiled as he shook out three reefers, then twisted the pipe back into place. It had been a touch of genius to see that extra valve and realize it needed only a short piece of capped pipe to make this cache for his pot supply. Detective Welker had looked right at it without a tumble.

Seated in the grimy but comfortable overstuffed chair, Grant lit one of the cigarettes. Next, he unclipped the heavy-barreled pen and pencil from his sport shirt pocket, unscrewed the caps, and inserted a cigarette in each of the hollow interiors. Then he puffed contentedly on his reefer and watched through the basement window as the bright glow of sunset faded into twilight. The satisfying euphoria seeped gradually into his brain and induced pleasant fantasy memories.

First there was a dreamy recreation of the pot party and talk session with Nash Sexton and Virgil Howard in his pad here several months ago. By fortuitous chance

he had flushed away his own butt just before the fuzz arrived. Unfortunately, Nash and Virgil were caught with half-smoked reefers, so the fuzz really shook the joint down, but Grant was clean.

He couldn't resist inserting the needle when Detective Welker looked under the boiler and around the pipes for the second time, and scowled when he finally gave up.

"Don't look so disappointed, Mr. Welker," Grant said as he reached for the fading rose in a water glass on the window ledge. "Here," he said, holding it toward the detective's face, "smell my rose!"

"Listen, you unshaved, unwashed porcupine," Detective Welker snarled in his hoarse voice, heavy black brows drawn together, "I know you've been puffing the weed—the enlarged pupils in your eyes prove that. I also know you push the stuff, and I make this prediction: Sooner or later your foot will slip, and marijuana will get you burned good.

"All of you come with me to the station. Your two pals, funny boy, for possession of pot—and you, because it's in your pad."

Grant Shank came back out of his memory dream, feeling good all over again about Detective Welker's futile search. He pulled on his reefer, and let his mind wander back in a rosy glow to the time he first

met Nadine Mizell, and the satisfying development of their Hippie Heaven romance.

She had been on Tazewell Street looking in the window of The Cracked Coffee Cup when Grant walked up behind her. His experienced eye told him she was another young chick from a classy family, out looking for a Hippie kick. Even from the rear she looked good in a form-fitting gray linen dress with a row of large smooth plastic buttons down the back, topped by one of those tousle-haired gray wigs that were the current "in" thing.

She turned as he stopped beside her, and he saw the gray color scheme repeated in her wide gray eyes, the long pale fingernails, even in the pallid grayish-lavender lipstick; a real gone kid, in spite of that starched and scrubbed look.

"I'm Grant Shank," he had said, letting his white teeth show through the brown underbrush. "Come on in and I'll stand for coffee."

"I'm Nadine Mizell," she had said, her voice a little uncertain. "Don't mind if I do."

As they pushed through the swinging doors he suddenly quivered inside, for he knew now why she had looked familiar. This was the daughter of Frankie Mizell who lived in that house with all



the columns over near Selma River under the big trees . . . and, some said, was Mr. Big in city rackets. Those who should know said Frankie Mizell was a bad man to cross.

Never had the price of a cup of coffee brought such interesting returns. She had the Hippie bug bad, and had made this trip to The Cracked Coffee Cup in spite of stern orders from her big-shot father to stay away from Hippie Heaven. She could not risk coming again, not soon anyway.

It had been Nadine's idea, however, for him to come along the river's edge and she would slip out behind her home to meet him there

under the moon. Things could not have worked out better. He had been in no hurry, called her "my exotic flower"—and they'd had their own private Hippie Heaven in the small grassy glade they called Paradise.

Grant took the last puff from his reefer, flushed away the butt, and started on his leisurely way to keep his tryst with Nadine in their Paradise.

As he approached the corner of Tazewell and Tenth Streets he recognized Detective Welker standing under the street light. This was a chance the euphoric effect from marijuana would not let him miss, because he knew the pupils of his eyes were enlarged from his recent pot smoke. White teeth gleamed through his beard in the street light glow as he stopped near the big scowling detective.

"Well, if it ain't Sherlock, the pot hunter himself," he said, grinning. "Look into my eyes, Hawkshaw, and see if you can find a clue to what I've been doing."

The big man's heavy brows came together as he drew a low breath, then said quietly, "Okay, wise guy, but don't forget my prediction: Marijuana is going to get you burned, but good. When it does I hope I'm on hand."

The moon was up as Grant Shank worked his way down the

woods path along the river edge. To his surprise Nadine was waiting in their grassy glade Paradise, and came toward him, smiling, in the same gray dress she had been wearing the first day they met. His great arms closed around her gently. He specialized in gentleness, because for a big man it's a good technique.

Then he unclipped the heavy-barreled pen and pencil set from his shirt pocket, unscrewed the caps, and lit a reefer for each of them. It was the usual ritual with which their trysts began.

An hour later as they stood in the glade, holding hands and looking at the moon's reflection on the flowing river water, she turned toward him.

"Grant," she said, her voice a little tremulous, "it will be even more wonderful now, because I'm pregnant—and so we'll get married." Then she added, "I'd never agree to any . . . other . . . solution."

The warm summer night grew suddenly cooler to Grant Shank, and the silence was oppressive. His thoughts tumbled in a frantic frenzy of disjointed ideas whirled around by the stimulation of marijuana on his brain . . . he was married already, so Nadine was asking him, to be a bigamist . . . but she didn't know about his wife . . . and what would Frankie Mi-

zell do when he found out the situation?

"Nobody knows about us yet," Nadine continued, "but Daddy will agree when he learns I'm pregnant."

A strident silent voice screamed inside Grant's skull, "No! Never! It can't be!" Then his eyes focused on the tree, with its smaller twin growing up from the same base so that the two of them looked like a slightly opened pair of scissors, and instantly his whirling, narcotic-stimulated thoughts came together into the clear and simple solution.

"Yes," he said quietly, "everything is going to be all right," and placed his arm around her waist gently—because he specialized in being gentle.

With his eyes on the tree, his thoughts pinwheeling around that simple solution, Grant stepped forward slowly and Nadine automatically stepped with him, as though in a dance. As they moved, he thought: *Nobody knows about us . . . what would her gangster father do if he learns Nadine is pregnant, and I'm married? Besides, I like Hippie Heaven . . . no more married life for me, ever! So it's the tree—the tree is the answer!*

When they stopped near the tree, with Nadine facing the opening between the twin trunks, Grant casually stepped around to the other

side, noting as he did so that the smaller of the two trunks would be just springy enough, but not too much. Then, facing Nadine, Grant moved his head toward her. She grasped the idea of a playful kiss, leaned toward him with her lips slightly parted in a happy smile . . . and his hands came up smoothly to grasp the hair on both sides of her head. In a continuous single movement he yanked her head downward, at the same time turning it so that Nadine's throat was toward the smaller and springier of the two trunks. Then, before she could cry out, her neck was wedged tightly in nature's garrote.

To make sure, Grant held on to her hair until the brief struggle was over. Before leaving, he searched the whole area for evidence that might incriminate him. There was nothing, not even footprints because of the grassy surface in the glade and mat of leaves under the trees—so maybe it would be declared a freak accident.

It was nearly noon the next day when the fuzz arrived at Grant's pad. He had not locked the door,

so they were inside when he woke up and jumped from bed.

Detective Welker was in front, his brows drawn into a single black line, and there were two uniformed cops behind him. "Get dressed," he said.

"Why?" Grant demanded. "Who the hell are you to come breaking in here?"

"You are under arrest for the murder of Nadine Mizell—get dressed."

Grant stood in numbed, dazed fear, yet reason told him they could not possibly know.

"It's happened quicker than I thought it might," Detective Welker said, his hoarse voice harsh and accusing. "I said marijuana would get you burned good some day—in fact, you'll burn in the chair. We got your fingerprints on file when you were booked over that little pot party here in your pad. Otherwise, you would have got away with it cold.

"You see, when we lifted fingerprints off the buttons on Nadine Mizell's dress they were useless—until we found your prints in our files."



All of us, perhaps, are pawns on the globular chessboard of fate.

WHAT if I had taken the Train



I HAVE always been fascinated by the many ways in which fate, with a careless hand, moves us in one direction or another toward the small or important events of our lives, trivial or exciting, happy or tragic. There is a compelling element of mystery attached to the complexities of time and circumstance which lead toward the climax of a dramatic happening.

Take the man who is delayed for some absurd reason beyond prediction and misses his plane by three minutes. The plane crashes and all aboard are killed. Fate dealt him a winning hand, but it could have been just the reverse. He could have missed the plane which arrived safely, catching the one which

crashed. Do you see what I mean?

One day you are driving home from work and just as you approach an intersection, there is a fatal accident. You see it happen and if you are morbidly curious, you join the crowd of stunned, gaping spectators. Somehow you get the grim details. A drunk ran a stoplight and slammed broadside into a car in your lane of traffic. The innocent driver was killed, the drunk survived with hardly a scratch.

Thinking back, you begin to wonder. If you had left the office ten seconds earlier, would you now be that dead driver en route to the morgue?

I used to keep track of the crazy twists of fate in my own life and all of this is simply leading up to that craziest of twists, one violent episode which puts all the others in the shade. In case you should find this one a bit tough to swallow, I've got some very tangible proof which I'll show you later.

It began quietly enough with no ominous clouds, no dark threats of trouble on the horizon of my immediate future. While working out of the L.A. office of a national ad agency as an account exec, I was chosen that spring to take charge of a new TV account, a drama series that would originate in New York when the dull sum-

mer repeats were replaced by the fresher, if not duller, offerings of the fall lineup.

I was in no hurry to check in at the New York office since I had a vacation coming first, so I decided to detour and pause in the Miami area to lounge around some palm-strewn, gal-studded beach while recovering from a case of blues evoked by a recent divorce. I was giving the gate to the L.A. beaches because familiarity breeds a certain ennui, if not contempt.

I had planned definitely to take the train in lieu of flight. It seemed to me that with luck and a winning smile, one might meet all sorts of interesting people on a train, including one or two toothsome members of the distaff variety. In three or more days there would be plenty of time to cultivate these little friendships, while a mere five hours aloft offered small promise.

At the last minute, after careful deliberation, I changed my mind. Unless I hit that rare jackpot combination, I revised, three days of rumbling east on a train could be a yawn as wide as the Grand Canyon, so why not charge off on the plane?

Here we have the first switch to a new course of action, with fate moving us toward an entirely different climax. What if I had taken the train? We'll never know, so

let's deal with what we do know. However, let's not get on the plane just yet because we haven't even reached the airport and there's a chance we may never get there, let alone board a plane.

When I came to these mighty conclusions about train versus plane it was past noon on a Friday and I wasn't able to make a reservation on an afternoon flight. Instead, they booked me on a jet scheduled to take wing at nine p.m.—but what if I *had* been able to find space on an afternoon flight? Well, you get the whole point, so let's not belabor it. You can fill in your own what-ifs as we move through this grim accounting.

Since I do not like dawdling around airports, train or bus depots while waiting listlessly to be conveyed somewhere, I usually dash for these forms of public transportation at the last possible moment, but on this occasion, for no reason other than to be in motion, I left with so much time to spare that I alighted at the port an hour before plane time. Slightly ahead of eight o'clock, I believe it was.

After delivering my baggage to the clerk, I bought a paper but couldn't come to terms with it. When my attention began to wander, I went outside. Pensive, I began to circle aimlessly past the

glass-enclosed terminals of the other airlines.

I watched the people milling about inside under the lights. Then I caught sight of Marian Lundy, secretary to Harvey Slater, the VP in charge of programming at the TV network of my former employment. She was standing behind the glass, looking almost directly at me in the sightless way of people who are torn by some deeply disturbing, inner emotion.

She was a girl in her late twenties, chestnut-haired, trim-figured and pretty enough to frame. She was also, to the despair of the entire executive wing, very much married. I hadn't seen her in nearly six months, but we had been quite chummy in the tenuous way of office relationships.

I remembered her as a gal with glinting green eyes who had a quick, sardonic wit. With me, at least, she had been delightfully flirtatious, though it seemed only an amusing game she played, knowing she could retreat behind the safe wall of her marriage if I ever took her seriously. Still, there was an undercurrent of excitement in our bantering dialogue, as if there might be real fire beneath the frail smoke screen of words. For my part, with the divorce action already in progress, I had desperately wished that she were avail-

able but it had stopped there.

I pushed through the glass doors and stood close beside her. She looked up at me. There was surprise in the readjustment of her pretty mouth, but the aqua-green eyes were lusterless and her look was more a shrug of indifference than a smile of welcome.

"Hello, Mr. Bennett," she said tonelessly.

"Suddenly I'm Mr. Bennett," I quipped. "What happened to good old 'Wayne'? That's what you used to call me."

"I used to know you better—

Wayne," she said with barely a smile.

"I'm gone only a few months and already your love has cooled," I told her. "Did you know that I stole your type eraser? And that every night before I place it lovingly beneath my pillow, I kiss it tenderly?"

"Wayne," she said gravely, rebukingly, "at any other time this would be fun. But I—I'm afraid you've caught me in a dreadful mood."

"Problems?"

She nodded, her eyes rolled up-



ward in emphasis. "You just won the annual award for understatement."

"Anything I can do?"

She shook her head as she clutched her lower lip with a row of teeth that would embarrass genuine pearls. Tears sprang from the corners of fetchingly slanted eyes.

"Well, I don't want to intrude, Marian. But if you need a shoulder—"

"No, it's not anything I could discuss, even with a close friend."

There was a silence. I asked her if she were meeting a plane or catching one.

"I'm on the eight-twenty-five flight to Denver," she said, dabbing at her eyes. "I used to live in Denver. I couldn't think of anyplace else to go."

I took her gently by the shoulders and turned her toward me. "Marian, I guess you understand that in back of my office clowning, I always had a big affection for you."

"No," she answered. "I don't have the ego to read special meanings between the lines, but it is nice to know." Her smile was tremulous.

"Whatever it is you're trying to cope with, Marian, I doubt if you'll find anyone in Denver more ready to help."

"I believe you," she replied, her

expression a painful groping for decision. "But I suppose you're flying off somewhere on important business."

"No, I'm beginning a vacation before I transfer to our New York office. I'm on my way to Miami."

"What time do you—"

"At nine."

"And if you missed the plane?"

"I'd simply catch another. I'm in no hurry. Are you?"

"A few hours wouldn't change anything," she said. "Neither would a few years." Then her features became distorted by the wrenching of some secret horror she was trying to dredge up from its hiding place. "You see, Wayne, my husband is dead. It was an accident—but I killed him."

We sat in a circular lounge perched atop a tower-like structure in the center of the airport. My baggage had not yet been put aboard and I had re-claimed it. Marian had not taken with her so much as an overnight case. She had fled impulsively, in terror and panic.

"It was a mistake to run," I said quietly. "Understandable enough, but a mistake. How long has it been?"

"Less than two hours," she answered.

"All right. Did you people have any plans to meet with friends who

might be looking for you?" I said.

"No. We weren't going out and we hadn't invited anyone over."

"Good. Then it's not too late. You can tell the police that you delayed because you were in shock and wanted to seek advice. Perhaps you were searching for a lawyer who could inform you of your legal rights, arrange bail and generally keep you from saying or doing anything which might tend to incriminate you."

"That sounds logical, Wayne. Oh, I'm so glad to have you on my side!" She gulped her drink, spilling some over her trembling hand.

I said, "First, you had better tell it all from the beginning. I know a bit about the law and I'd like to see just how bad it will look to the police on the surface. Did you touch or change anything?"

"No."

"Go ahead, then."

"Well, it was an argument," she began, speaking around her cigarette as I lighted it, exhaling nervous little wisps of smoke. "I wish I could say it was about something momentous or dramatic, but it wasn't that way at all. Just another fight over trifles, except that this one got out of hand."

"Doug, my husband," she went on, "had become more and more critical of me in the last three months or so. He was always a

dominant sort. I mean, he knew exactly how he wanted things, down to the smallest details of our life, and he never was very tolerant of my rather casual approach to keeping house, marketing, having something done to the car—things like that.

"He was irritatingly precise and disciplined to doing minor chores *now*, and in just the *right* way, *his* way. And he expected me to keep pace with him, even though I hold a full-time job and often come home exhausted.

"At first, while the aura of the honeymoon lasted, I shaped everything to his exact requirements, but as we settled down to humdrum routine, I became more lax and he became more stingingly sarcastic. He always took for granted everything I did well, never even gave me honorable mention for bringing home a good salary to help out. But one little lapse and he was on my back, snarling.

"At times I actually hated him. But like most of us, he has—had his good points too, just enough of them to keep me from admitting to myself that we were earth and moon apart and that the marriage was a miserable mistake. Then, about three months ago, he lost his job, at the very moment when he was expecting a raise and a boost up the ladder.

"They gave him the usual pat excuse they hand people when the truth is embarrassing; they were cutting down overhead and his particular job was going to become practically nonexistent. He was exceedingly bitter but he didn't say much and I had to figure it out for myself. From observation I knew it had nothing to do with his ability. He just couldn't get along with people. He was disagreeable, maddeningly bossy, and he had that great big sarcastic mouth.

"Well, he got another job, a lesser one. But he was never the same, which isn't saying much. Secretly, I believe he thought of himself as a hopeless failure and, perhaps to compensate by pulling me down, or to make me his whipping-girl, he became not just critical of me, but supercritical. His behavior pattern was borderline insanity. He needed to see an analyst. I told him so in the nicest possible way.

"He took that as an outrageous insult and grew to be more of a tyrant then ever—to the point where I began to find legitimate-seeming ways to dodge him at night; going to a movie with a girlfriend, playing bridge and so on.

"Well, that's a rather necessary slice of background and it—it brings us up to tonight. As usual, he got home ahead of me and the

very second I came in the door he asked me why I hadn't done the breakfast dishes, which were still unwashed and egg-faced in the sink.

"I could've told him there hadn't been time because I was running late for work, but it had been a bad day and I was too beat to care how I answered. In any case, I was fairly bursting with too much of him, ready to take out my resignation papers in Nevada. So I said I didn't do the dishes because I damn well didn't feel like doing them. I remarked that I hadn't noticed that his hands were in a cast, and offered to show him where to find all the materials he needed for scrubbing.

"He was furious, of course. He went to make himself a drink and when he found we were out of bourbon he demanded to know why I was so stupid that I couldn't check the supply and pick up another bottle. Then he didn't like what we were having to eat but said it didn't matter because I was the only one he knew who could take an ordinary TV dinner from the freezer, place it in an ordinary oven, and transform it into something that tasted like laundry soap.

"Finally, he expressed his loathing for this new dress I'm wearing, one I just bought with my own money during lunch hour. He said

it was gaudy, a cheap, office-girl rag, but typical of my taste.

"That did it! I snapped back that as long as he found me so inadequate, so repulsive in every way, I knew at least one man who would take me off his hands in a hurry, in fact, before the night was over I might be gone . . ."

She paused and I asked her if there had been anyone special she had in mind when she needled her husband with that one?

Her eyelids descended to half-mast when she replied, "Of course not. I was just goading Doug, being vindictive. He dared me to give him a name, so I tossed the first one at him that came into my head—the boss, Harvey Slater. Now you and I know that's absurd because Harvey Slater is old enough to be my father, and if I made a move in his direction he might fall out a window escaping, he's so proper.

"But Doug had never met Harvey and he believed me. I was getting under his skin, so I enlarged on the whole bit, going on about how much loot Harvey had and even insinuating that on certain nights we had been holding hands together, making plans.

"Doug was positively livid. He began to shout accusations. We shot words back and forth. We stabbed each other with the sort of

deeply wounding, character mutilating barbs you can never really patch with an apology after the storm, because they're so close to the truth.

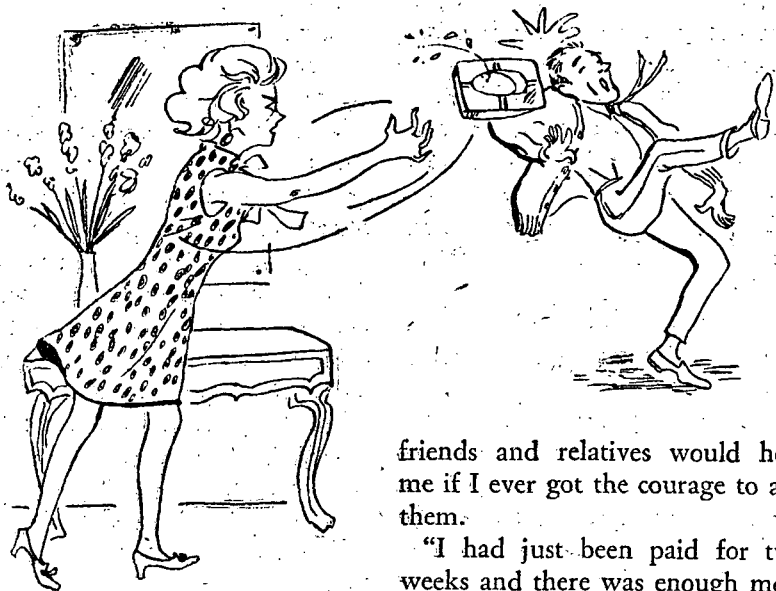
"In the end, he called me something too obscene and degrading to repeat, and in a rage beyond thought, I scooped an ashtray from a table and hurled it at him. Well, not at him exactly, not in the sense that you take careful aim. I didn't want or expect to hit him. I just had to send something crashing in his direction to shut him up.

"It was one of those thick, solid-glass ashtrays, heavy and square, with sharp corners. You know the kind, they're practically indestructible."

She paused again and there were fresh tears in her eyes. "By some horrible freak," she continued, "the tray sailed through the air as if guided perfectly by an evil force and struck him in the temple with a sickening thud.

"He clutched at his head and his hand came away covered with— with blood. Then he just collapsed to the floor. I could see that he was dead, it was obvious. This terribly pallid, gray look of death had seeped into his face.

"I sagged into a chair and I sat vacantly for a few minutes in that frightfully silent livingroom where Doug's booming voice still



bounced from the walls of my mind. I reached for the phone but couldn't make the call. After three tries I got a cigarette going and at this time there was a kind of sketchy, fragmentary picture in my jumbled thoughts of what would happen next; the police cars wailing outside, the reporters, the relentless questions, then jail and a long trial ending in—what? The gas chamber? I didn't know.

"The silence and aloneness, Doug there on the floor, only increased my panic. I hadn't a single logical idea, just the one thought—to hide someplace beyond reach where I could think, and where

friends and relatives would help me if I ever got the courage to ask them.

"I had just been paid for two weeks and there was enough money, so I left everything behind and I ran out and got a taxi to the airport."

Having come to the end of it, she slumped down in her chair and waited mournfully for my reaction. I didn't say anything for a space because I was groping feverishly for a plan. I can't say that I was sad to hear that Douglas Lundy was dead. Hell, I didn't know the man and it didn't seem as if the world would miss him very much. On the other hand, I did know his widow, and the imprisoned feeling I had for her was being paroled, the gates of hope had opened with a fantastic twist of fate.

At that moment, what I wanted

most was to keep Marian Lundy at large and available, on the freedom side of the bars.

"Well, what do you think, Wayne?" she asked in a pale voice close to a whisper. "What should I do now?"

"You should stay here in town and we'll deal with this thing together."

"Oh, Wayne, you really are a friend! And—and much more. I can't tell you how—"

"Double in spades," I said. "But right now let's work out the problem, let's get into high gear. First, it's not quite as bad as I had imagined. The circumstances can be made to work for you rather than against you. Just the fact that you're a woman, young and mighty attractive, will be persuasive. After all, in any so-called crime situation where the law is involved, we're confronted mostly with men. Sympathy will flood toward you if we give it a little push."

"Yes, but how? Don't forget, if it goes to trial, there might be several women on the jury."

"It need not go to trial, Marian. In fact, it must not go to trial because you might get a couple of years or so for involuntary manslaughter, which I think is the worst they can do to you. An inquest perhaps, but no, not a trial."

"Fine. But it sounds so simple

the way you put it. How could such a thing possibly be arranged?"

"By a very slight alteration at what is tritely called the scene of the crime," I told her. "Now don't get the impression that I'm completely amoral and that I condone killing people, even accidentally. Still, it *was* an accident, and what can be gained by sending a nice gal like you to prison after a messy trial and all that goes with it?"

"Nothing," she said woefully. "It would break my heart, and my spirit. It might even ruin my life."

"Exactly, Marian. Exactly."

"Then tell me what you have in mind."

"All right, let's suppose that as you relate it to the police, you make only one change in your story—the ending. His hate and jealousy aroused by your fake threat to leave him and go off with the boss, your husband makes a dash for the kitchen and comes back with a knife. 'I'm gonna kill you!' he shouts, and begins to advance toward you. At this point, with no idea but to delay him while you escape out the door, you fling the ashtray at him. And by some chance-in-a-hundred freak, it hits and kills him.

"It was his fault but you are wretchedly sorry and grief-stricken, as anyone can see."

She nodded. "Marvelous. Perfectly believable. Except that he *didn't* have a knife in his hand."

"But he will, Marian, that's the point. When he's found, he *will* have a knife in his hand. At least it will rest near his hand and his prints will be on the handle. Understand?"

"Yes," she said with an undertone of vast relief and excitement. "You couldn't make it much clearer."

I stood. "Then let's go," I said. "Let's hurry."

She lived, I discovered, in one of those apartment buildings sprouting above Hollywood Boulevard, east of Highland. We went wordlessly to the second floor and with a look of awe and dread filling her eyes, she quietly unlocked the door.

The livingroom was small and not heavily furnished. It took only a glance to note that it certainly didn't contain Doug Lundy's corpse. I was about to voice my opinion that it was a very unfunny gag, when I saw on the carpet a quite large, rusty splotch, and close by, face down, a heavy glass ashtray.

I did not pick it up but I bent down to examine it. One sharp corner was slightly chipped and held a small, dried stain of blood.

Standing, I looked into Marian's startled eyes and said, "Well, unless

someone discovered him and had him carted off, which is most unlikely, your boy is still alive."

She gasped, crooking a finger and biting the knuckle. "Do you think he came to and somehow got to a hospital?"

"I don't know what to think," I answered, "except that apparently you didn't kill him after all."

"How sad for you both," said a chilling voice, and I glanced up sharply to see Doug Lundy postured in a doorway left of the livingroom. At least I assumed it was Lundy. His head was heavily and professionally bandaged. There was no doubt that he had been listening behind the door.

Beyond the fact that his head was bandaged, I can remember little about him, for I was fascinated by the gun in his hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Harvey Slater," he said to me with mock formality, and then quickly to Marian, "So this is the boss, the lover come to take possession of the dead man's widow, even before the body's had time to cool. Right, Marian?"

"Doug!" she cried, "I'm so glad you're alive! But you misunderstand. This is not—"

Well, that was the last word she said to him because at that instant he shot her quite casually, a wry little smile on his face.

As I watched her take a stumbling step, then crumple and fall in a pitiful heap, there was hardly time for one agonized thought before he turned the gun on me and fired again. A hot finger of lead explored my chest with a searing pain and the floor heaved toward me. Then the room vanished.

I remember a sound of distant voices, a vague sensation of movement, the muted keening of a siren, more voices, disembodied faces hovering near, and then nothing at all.

Much later, a solemn intern told me that my life had been saved with half an inch to spare, and that of the three shots fired by Douglas Lundy, the only fatal one was the last, aimed at his own bandaged head . . .

Marian and I are about as happy as we can be in this violent, unpredictable world. We have a charming little house in Westchester, not uncomfortably close to New York City. I disagree with poor dead Lundy—Marian is an excellent cook, and since she no longer has

to work, she even helps me with the dishes now and then.

Getting dressed this morning, we were comparing bullet scars, and then at breakfast we got to reminiscing and what-ifying again.

"What if you had taken the train?" Marian said as she glanced affectionately across the room at little Wayne Junior in his playpen.

"Yeah, and what if I had been able to get space on an afternoon flight and I missed you at the airport?" I added.

"What if we had never gone back to my apartment but to the police instead?" Marian supplied.

"Try this one," I injected. "Suppose when we got to the apartment, instead of shooting us, Lundy listened to your explanation and we shook hands all around?"

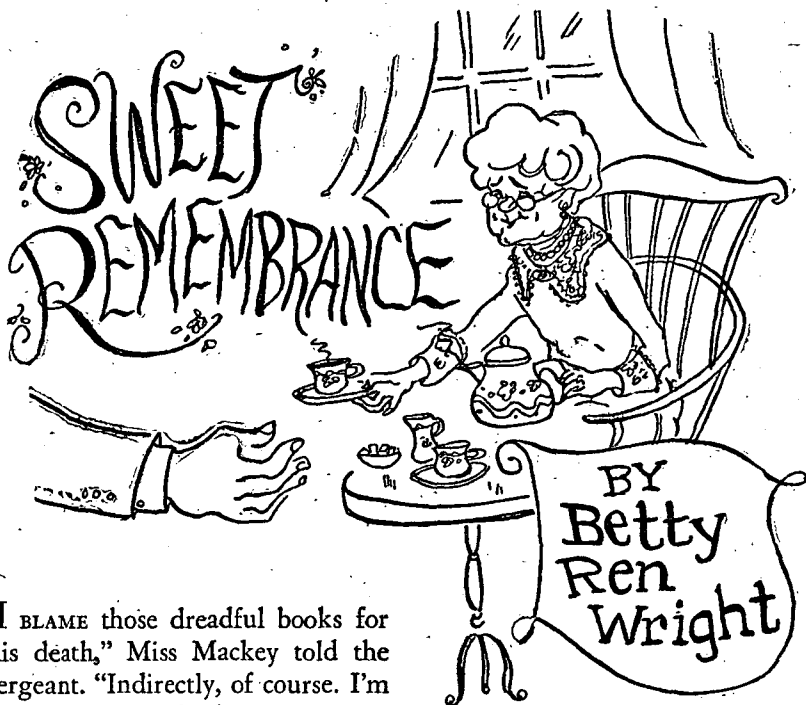
"What if he'd been a better shot and had killed us both?" Marian posed.

"Maybe he did," I replied with a chuckle, "and here we are in heaven."

"Now really," said Marian with a soft smile, "that's pretty sweet. Let's leave it right there."



The proper disposition of nostalgia may well be to remember, sigh—then good-bye.



I BLAME those dreadful books for his death," Miss Mackey told the sergeant. "Indirectly, of course. I'm liberal in my thinking, I assure you, but I do think that publishers have a responsibility. Have you *seen* the kind of trash being sold in every drugstore and supermarket at this very moment?"

She didn't look like a liberal. The sergeant watched her thin white hands, expert among the tea things, and felt nostalgia for an age he had

never known. In the short hours of their acquaintance he had become very fond of Miss Mackey, and he could not understand why. Certainly she was nothing like his mother—his noisy, moody, cheerfully vulgar Ma—nor like any of his noisy, cheerful, vulgar sisters and aunts.

Perhaps that was it, he decided, forgetting for a moment the dreary purpose of his visit in the pleasure of watching her pour tea into pearly cups. Perhaps he loved her because she was the other side of his moon, the unresolved, even unrecognized dream of what a female should be.

"Now, about Mr. Higgins," she said with endearing directness, after he had taken his first sip of tea. "He is a simply heartbreaking example of what I mean. If he didn't read those books—if he didn't think those thoughts!—I venture to say he would be alive at this moment."

The sergeant set his cup back on its saucer. "I don't see—" he began gently, but she was quite ready to explain her theory.

"He always had one of those dreadful books in his overalls pocket," she said. "You know, the ones with the covers. He was always snatching a moment to read them—I've seen him—and all that nastiness aroused his prurient curiosity. Prurient curiosity, young man." She passed him a plate of tiny cookies, which he refused. "Why else would he have been lurking behind my draperies?"

"Robbery, perhaps," the sergeant suggested, but Miss Mackey would have none of it.

"Nonsense! As the janitor of this

building he had keys to every apartment, and he knew that I go to my book club every Tuesday afternoon without fail, and buy my groceries every Friday morning, so he had plenty of opportunity to come in if he simply wanted to take something." She shook her little white head decisively. "No, Sergeant, carnal appetite was his problem, and guilt was what did him in. When I saw him and screamed, he turned and climbed out of the window as though he had taken leave of his senses. He was the very picture of a guilt-ridden man."

It was one more delight that Miss Mackey saw nothing strange in Mr. Higgins choosing to spy on her instead of on one of the younger women who lived in the building, the sergeant decided. He put aside the tea regretfully. "Well, I won't bother you any longer," he said. "You've been very kind and helpful, and I'm sure you're tired after your bad experience. Thank you for the tea."

She followed him to the door. "You are not at all the way one usually imagines a detective to be," she said. "You're very young. And you have a certain—grace."

The sergeant stiffened for a moment. How his parents would have roared at that, how his brothers and sisters would have jeered!

Grace, he thought, and then decided he liked the sound of it as long as no one else had heard.

Westerberg was waiting in the lobby. "Well?" he asked.

"An elegant old lady."

"Who pushes janitors out of windows."

The sergeant led the way to the car feeling very much on the defensive. "So a few people heard her scolding him for reading dirty books," he said grumpily. "So this makes her a killer? She admits she spoke to him about it—for his own good. She thought she was doing her duty."

"She threatened him," Westerberg said patiently. "He told people in the apartment about it, thought it was a joke. She told him he'd be punished if he kept up his sinful ways, that his evil thoughts were showing in his face. She sounds like a nut."

"She's a nice old lady trying to set the world straight," the sergeant told him. "Anybody who wants to magnify that into a criminal act is going to have his hands full."

He thought about Miss Mackey while he shaved, mentioned her guardedly to his date at dinner, and that night he dreamt he was fighting a duel under an oak tree that was festooned with Spanish moss.

In the morning there was a re-

port on his desk at the station, and Westerberg was waiting in the chair by the window, a cup of coffee in his hands. When he had finished reading the report, the sergeant sat for a long time staring at the crack that marred the brown-egg wall in front of him.

"I was never as young as you are when I was as young as you are," Westerberg said finally, when the coffee was gone and the silence had become too oppressive to be borne. "Do you want me to go get the old lady while you patch up your shattered illusions?"

"Go get her!" the sergeant repeated sharply. "Why should you get her? You want to send her to the chair because this damn sheet says someone died in the last apartment she lived in, too?"

"Not just *someone*," Westerberg set the coffee cup on the windowsill, adjusting its position slightly to coincide with the stains already there. "A window-washer; a wholesome, clean-living fellow who supported a wife, a mother, a sister, and the sister's two kids. Been washing windows for seventeen years, and there was never a complaint about him not minding his own business until Miss Mackey moved into the building. She reported him twice as a peeping tom—and the third time he was doing her windows he fell seven stories

to the ground and broke his neck."

The sergeant slouched in his chair and thought of gallantry in the shade of a giant oak. "You can't arrest a nice old lady for being around when two people died," he said, "whether she happened to like them or not."

"Tell me one thing," Westerberg said with irritating gentleness. "Did the nice old lady mention the window-washer to you? Did she tell you Mr. Higgins was the second man to leave her elegant presence in a great big hurry?"

The sergeant looked at him with something close to hate. "No," he said. "She didn't happen to mention it. She probably assumed we'd look at it the same way she did—as a nasty coincidence."

"Good grief!" Westerberg said, but he didn't go on with the discussion.

They spent the rest of the day talking to residents of the apartment building. Most of them had known Mr. Higgins casually; none of them had thought there was anything odd about him, though they all agreed that he had been seen with lurid paperbacks in his hands and was always well-informed about, and eager to discuss, the latest sensational murder. Three residents reported having received anonymous letters in the last couple of months: a bachelor who

had a painting of a nude delivered to his apartment; a model who had posed in a bikini for a slick magazine; and a young actress who had been accused in her letter of letting a man stay overnight in her apartment. Each of the letters had been a warning of punishment to come; none of them had been taken seriously. The recipients remembered that they were written on pale gray, tissue-thin paper in fine script.

As he looked over his notes, the sergeant wondered why he found it impossible to believe anything bad of Miss Mackey. Who was to say, actually, that her righteous innocence did not become a twisted, perverted passion behind those bright blue eyes? His mind simply would not accept it. He moved angrily through the long day, and at the end of it he visited her again, wondering at his own sense of homecoming as he sat down in the parlor.

Parlor, he thought. The word prompted a picture of plush and velour and china figurines; a Seth Thomas clock; books bound in muted leather, stillness tucked protectively around every object. Then he remembered that when he was twelve he had asked his seventh grade teacher a question about Browning and, in an ecstasy of gratitude—how many seventh graders had ever asked her about Brown-

ing?—she, had invited him to stop in at her home that evening and pick up a book.

The house was a treasure of towering gingerbread where she had lived first with her parents and then alone. The boy had entered into a dream when he stepped through its door. The crowded kitchen, center of life at home, had faded from his consciousness as if it had never been, and with it the bursts of laughter, the slaps, the curses, the tears that were the music he lived by. Dignity, dry wit, and most of all, orderliness were what he found in the teacher's old house, and he had gone back again and again making mental lists of subjects to ask about the next time as his eyes moved over the ceiling-high shelves of books.

"You look tired, Sergeant." There was a tiny crease of concern between Miss Mackey's eyes. "I don't think I'll offer you tea this time. I have a better idea." She crossed the room to a glass-doored cabinet and took from its glittering depths a crystal decanter and two glasses on a tray. The glass was like a small bubble in his hand; he held it gingerly and let the brandy restore him.

"How is your case developing?" she asked as he settled back in his chair. "Have you learned what you needed to know about that unfor-

fortunate man?" She might have been asking about the weather, or his indigestion, or where he was going to go on his vacation.

"Well," he said, "it seems to be getting more complicated instead of less so. We're beginning to wonder whether there's some connection between Mr. Higgins' death and another one that occurred some time ago."

She took a tiny sip from her glass. "I don't understand."

"Your theory," he told her, "may be the right one."

She leaned forward with a tiny smile of triumph. "Twisted thoughts," she said. "Evil influences lead men to do things they would not otherwise do."

"Twisted thoughts," the sergeant agreed. "Of the murderer, however, rather than the victims'. There's someone living in this building, Miss Mackey, who is very mixed up indeed."

She watched alertly as he put down his glass and went to the window. "I hate to keep going over this," he said, "but I have to be very sure of the facts." He opened the window as far as it would go. "Now," he said, "when you came into the room you saw Mr. Higgins standing there, partly hidden by the drapery. You had no idea till then that he was in the apartment."

"That is correct," Miss Mackey said, and the sergeant seemed to hear again his seventh grade teacher's voice.

"You're sure you didn't call Mr. Higgins in to fix a window?" he went on. "Some of your neighbors report having heard voices in the hallway minutes before Mr. Higgins fell."

"Certainly not," Miss Mackey said.

"When you caught sight of him, you screamed and ordered him to leave," the sergeant went on.

"Exactly." Miss Mackey put down her glass and came over to the window. "He seemed to panic. He crawled out on the sill, looked back over his shoulder at me, and then he fell forward and was gone."

"Like this." The sergeant then climbed cautiously onto the sill and crouched there, balancing himself with his fingertips. He looked back in time to see her small, reproachful face close to his shoulder, and then he felt her hands on his back, pushing with great purpose, and he was hurtling out into space.

"Like that," he heard Miss Mack-

ey say very closely behind him.

It was an astonishingly long way down. The sergeant thought of his ma, and of the cheerful, sometimes ribald girls he had loved as he grew up. He saw, in kaleidoscope, the dark places of his life and the churning colors, the chronic grand disorder of being alive. When he landed, bouncing twice in the great lap of the safety net, it was as if he had resigned himself—committed himself—forever to the way things actually were.

Westerberg helped him down.

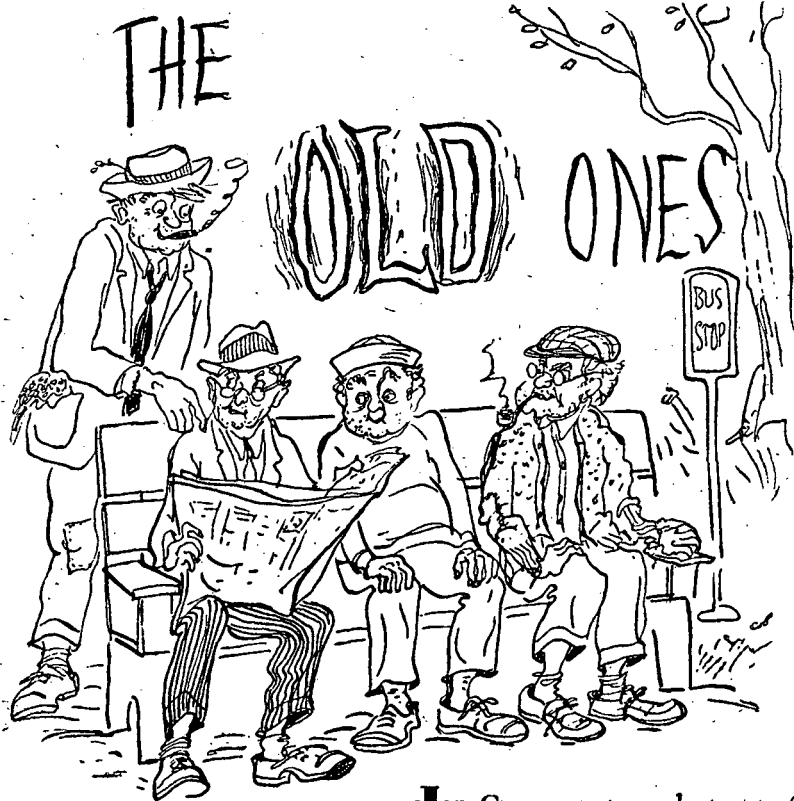
"You want to go up or should I?" he asked sympathetically.

"You go," the sergeant said.

He waited in the dark courtyard until Westerberg had disappeared into the building. Then he straightened his coat and went around the side of the building to where the patrol car was parked. He took out his pipe. He knew they wouldn't be down for a while. Miss Mackey would want to wash the brandy glasses and put them away, powder her nose, and close the window before she went to the station.



Could it be possible that our beneficent social legislation might also harbor ghoulish propensities?



by Edwin
P. Hicks

JOE CHAVISKI stopped at a traffic light by the Plaza and looked over at the three men seated on the bus-stop bench—old Joe Turnesea, Hank Boyce, and Charlie Franks—and a wave of sadness swept over him. These old timers were

down and out, without a soul who would care if they dropped dead. Their clothes were shabby, their hair needed cutting, they needed shaves, and their old faces were the texture of leather, their eyes dim with age. What did they have to live for?

As he watched, another down-and-outer, Fred Hartner, walked up behind them and placed his hand on Hank Boyce's shoulder. Boyce turned and grinned, Hartner grinned back, and they joshed one another, but the expression on both their faces touched Joe. As he drove on, there was a moistness in his eyes. Things like he had just seen affected him unaccountably at times. Here he had been thinking that not a soul would miss any one of them if he were suddenly to drop dead—but the expression which had passed between Hartner and Boyce was as near love as he had ever witnessed. Nobody cared for them—except their own kind. They had nothing to live for—except each other. They were unimportant to the world—but important to each other!

It was the third of the month so Joe had been downtown to cash his police retirement check and his veteran's disability pension, and to pick up a load of groceries. Now, as he unloaded his groceries at his home, he kept thinking about these

unwanted old men. The story of their lives was similar, he figured—insufficient education, a lifetime of hard work until they could work no longer; divorce or separation from women whom they had once loved and who once may have loved them, or separation from them by death; then a gradual drift downward, accompanied by liquor and heartbreak, with a war or two thrown in. Eyes eager for love and appreciation had found none responding. Children whom they had brought into the world and had cared for during tender years, no longer wanted them, and now were bringing up children of their own.

Joe broiled a steak for his supper, served it with a baked potato, and green peas. Joe could sympathize with these old timers in a way. He had been living by himself for the past seven years, ever since his beloved Lucy had passed on, but his lot was much better than the old men on the street. He was younger, comfortably fixed, had a little in savings—and went fishing. He was still living, while these old-timers were barely hanging on.

Yes, Joe knew them all. He had jailed three of the four, several times on drunk charges, or fighting, when he was on the force. That Franks was a rootin'-tootin'

son-of-a-gun with his fists in the old days. Sailor Turnesea was another. He had served in the navy in both World War I and World War II, and he had never got over the free and easy ways of a wartime sailor on shore leave—until old age had slowed his sea roll to a crawl. Fred Hartner, like Franks and Turnesea, also had an appetite for liquor, but Boyce—old Hank Boyce—had never been in any trouble, even as a young man. He still wore a tie—faded and gravy-stained—but he still wore it, and he was always a shade neater than his companions.

How did they live? By pensions, one way or another, Social Security, veterans' welfare—who knew? Yet on a sunny day you would always find one or more of them down near the Plaza, occupying the bench by the bus stop. Joe thought of all this as he ate. Wouldn't it be better if they went to some home for old folks? "No, damn it, it wouldn't!" he said fiercely to himself. These old-timers were still enjoying the warm sunlight and the outdoors. They were still down on Main Street, where life was happening. Maybe they couldn't do much participating anymore, but they could watch life as it went by and comment on its passing. As he dozed off to sleep that night, Joe still could see the glad smile

on Fred Hartner's face as he placed his hand on old Hank Boyce's shoulder—and Boyce's happy smile in return.

In the morning newspaper on the fifth of the month, Joe read a two paragraph story on the obituary page, telling of the passing of Harry (Hank) Boyce, who had been found dead by a police patrol car in the alley between North Third and Fourth streets at 3 a.m. the night before. Dr. Greer, county coroner, had ruled that death was the result of natural causes. The body was at the Jones Mortuary, pending the completion of funeral arrangements. The story stated that Boyce was "retired" and had no known relatives.

Joe was tidying up his house a few minutes later when there was a knock on his door. It was old Fred Hartner, and he had come by cab!

"Come in, Fred! Come in!" Joe invited. "Have a chair. Sit down."

The old fellow was wearing a fresh black tie, he had shaved, and he had on a clean white shirt!

"Mister Joe," he began, "I didn't know where else to turn, so I come to you."

"What can I do for you, Fred?"

"It's about Mister Boyce. They found him dead early yesterday morning."

"I was just reading about it in

the paper. I'm very sorry, Fred."

The old fellow pulled out a handkerchief and blew his nose to cover up a swipe at his eyes.

"Doc Greer said Mister Boyce died of natural causes. He didn't do no such thing, Joe. He was murdered!"

"Murdered? What makes you think so?"

"He was murdered just like Jim Givens last month, and old Sody Peterson in February, and Tad Bossemeyer a month before that."

Jim Givens, Sody Peterson, Tad Bossemeyer! Joe had known them all. They were old-timers, pensioners, loners who had measured their livelihood as younger men by the sweat of their bodies and the callouses on their hands. In each instance there had been a bare mention of their deaths in the paper, as there was about the death of Hank Boyce. Then the coffin lid had been closed, the dirt had been patted down on their graves, and the curtain on their lives had been drawn.

"What are you driving at, Fred?"

"Just this, Mister Chaviski. It don't make a damn to the world when one of us old-timers passes on. Not many of us has any relatives to kick up a fuss, so you find an old timer's body stiff and cold in some alley, smelling of liquor and an empty bottle in his hand

—and what happens? The cops call the funeral home. The funeral home calls the coroner. The coroner takes one look at the dead guy and says, 'Just another alcoholic—the world's better off and he is, too.' So the coroner signs the death certificate, 'Death from natural causes,' and nobody seems to care one way or another. The coroner gets his fee. The funeral home goes through the stiff's wallet—and it is always empty—so they contact the county, or the Social Security people, or Welfare, or the Veteran's Administration for burial money. And that's that."

"Yes," said Joe, "I know. I saw a hundred cases handled that way when I was on the force."

"Don't you remember reading about those fellows I mentioned being found dead?"

"Yes, now that you mention it, but I just thought they had come to the end of the line like we all have to do someday."

"Sure, you didn't think anything about it," said Hartner bitterly, "but Mister Boyce didn't just come to the end of his line. There's something going on, Mister Chaviski. We old-timers been talking about it. Why just the other afternoon Hank, I mean Mister Boyce, and ole Sailor Turnesea, and Chuck Franks and me was sitting down there at the Plaza bus stop,

and we was laughing about which one of us would be killed that night."

"Why *that* night?"

"It was pension night, Joe. We had all cashed our pension checks that day. It was the third of the month, day before yesterday, and that was usually the date when those other guys I told you about was found dead of 'natural causes'—with wallets and pockets empty, when a few hours before they had at least seventy or seventy-five dollars, maybe minus the cost of a couple of beers or a couple of shots of whisky."

Joe whistled. Perhaps old Fred wasn't just talking through his hat!

"What about Hank Boyce?"

"Mister Boyce and I had a room together in that building across the street from the Plaza Bar. You know the place."

Joe nodded.

"We been living there together on our pensions for the last three years. Mister Boyce was an educated man. He made a little money buying and selling old books. Got letters regular from New York and places like that."

"I never knew about that."

"It's the truth. But that ain't the reason I'm so sure he was murdered. When the police found him they say he had liquor spilled on him, and an empty bottle in his

hand—and liquor run out of his mouth." The old fellow paused and wiped at his eyes again.

"Yes?"

"Mister Boyce never took a drop of liquor, not even a beer, in the three years I been living with him."

"Are you sure?"

"I'll swear to it. Me, I get drunk whenever I can get the money—wine, gin, whisky—anything. You know that, Joe. But Mister Boyce, he never drank. He'd stay with me to keep me from getting hurt—just as gentle as a baby he treated me. And sometimes he ought to have took something and busted my head in. I get kinda mean when I'm drinking, but he was always kind and understanding. I loved that man, Mister Chaviski."

"What happened that last night?"

"I got drunk—the night he needed me so much. I was soused and didn't even know he was dead until around noon yesterday when Sailor Turnesea come by the room and tole me."

"How much do you remember about that night? What is the last thing you remember about Boyce?"

"We had some chili at Hammy Martin's place across from the Plaza Bar and right near where we roomed. Then he went with me to the Plaza. We both knew I was going to get drunk, and he always went along to look after me. They

was a stranger fellow talking to us sometime during the night, or talking mainly to Mister Boyce. They was talking about an old book called *Hell On The Border*. You've heard about that book?"

"Sure."

"This fellow said he had one. I remember Mister Boyce was interested and said if he had an original he'd buy it from him. They got to haggling about price. That's the last thing I remember because I was pretty well loaded by that time. Gus Haver tole me this morning that this guy and Mister Boyce took me to my room. He said they come back in about five minutes and talked some more, while the stranger had another beer. Then they left together."

"Do you know who that man was?"

"No, but I've seen him around a time or two—always comes around near the first of the month or a little after. He's about forty years old, pretty well dressed. Big domino player and sometimes gets in a poker game. Plays pool a lot. First name is Jim. That's all I know. I ain't got no money for pool or I'd take him on. Used to be pretty good when I was younger."

"Would you like a beer?" Joe asked.

The glazed old eyes brightened. "Don't mind if I do."

Joe opened a couple of cans, gave Hartner one, kept one himself.

Hartner raised his can. "Here's to Mister Boyce, the best friend a man ever had. May God rest his soul!"

Joe nodded and drank his beer. And he had been wondering how close these old timers were to each other! Old Fred Hartner was really broken up about 'Mister Boyce's' death.

"Tell you what I'm going to do, Fred. When we've finished our beer, I'm taking you down to see Guinn, the prosecuting attorney. I think we can get an order for an autopsy. But you keep it quiet, you understand?"

"Okay, Joe. I won't tell a soul."

The prosecuting attorney had only one question to ask Hartner, after he had told his story: "Why didn't you tell Coroner Green that Boyce never touched a drop of liquor?"

"Because I was sleeping off a drunk in my room, and didn't even know he was dead until yesterday noon," the old man said.

The order was issued. The autopsy showed that Harry Boyce's larynx and trachea had been crushed by a pair of powerful hands! Old Hartner was right. Boyce had been murdered!

The bodies of Jim Givens, Sody

Peterson, and Tad Bossemeyer were exhumed and autopsies performed. In each instance, it was discovered that they had been strangled to death—their throats had been crushed by hands strong as iron!

The whole investigation was kept under cover. To prevent a leak to the press, all news media representatives were called in by the prosecuting attorney, the sheriff, and the chief of police, and given the picture in confidence. Their cooperation was asked in withholding the story until something was worked out. A killer who preyed on aged pensioners was at large in the city, and a news leak would be fatal to their future plans. The press agreed to go along.

Joe Chaviski dropped into Haver's Plaza Bar one night for a bottle of beer. Gus Haver reached a hand over the bar as he was serving him. "Long time no see, Joe," he said. "How you been, boy?"

"Just so-so, Gus. Kinda gets lonely nights. Thought I'd drop by for old times' sake." He put a bill on the counter.

Gus pushed the money back toward Joe. "No, Joe. I'll pay for the first one—like you say, for old times' sake. I was wondering what had happened to you, why I never saw you around."

Joe went to a booth at the back and sat where he could watch everyone who came in. In a few minutes Gus came over to the booth. This time Joe bought the beers. Up front, Fred Hartner and Sailor Turnesea were drinking wine.

"Not many of the old-timers left," Joe said.

"That's right, Joe. They're dropping off like flies. Man, it's good to see you. How you been?"

"Can't complain," said Joe. "Never felt better and never had less."

"Ain't it the truth," said Gus. "Sometimes I think I'll get out of this business. Taxes getting higher and higher, things getting rougher all the time. Can't hardly operate, there is so much red tape—privilege licenses, license for every juke box, marble board—everything I got in the house. Sometimes I think I'll sell out and go back to the Old Country."

"You'll never do that," said Joe. "You'd miss the gang like I miss the force."

"Yes, I guess I would. But I got to do something. I'm getting as big as a hippopotamus. Don't get enough exercise in here." They talked a bit longer, and then Gus waddled back to his cash register.

A man whom Joe didn't know had sat down in the booth with

Hartner and Sailor Turnesea. The fellow had his back turned, but from what Joe could see, he judged him to be around forty. He was dark-haired, short and heavyset, and fairly well dressed. After a few minutes the stranger got up, gave Joe a close onceover as he passed, hesitated as if he were about to stop at Joe's booth, then went on to the pool tables. In a moment he was chalking a cue.

It was 10:45. The pangs of hunger suddenly struck Joe, and he got up and started for the door. As he passed Hartner, the old fellow nodded and winked. It was the tip-off that the man he had been



talking to was the one who had been talking about rare books to Hank Boyce the night Boyce was killed!

Joe went across the avenue to the chili parlor and ordered a couple of hamburgers, a cup of coffee, and

his usual dish of vanilla ice cream.

Too bad Sailor Turnesea was with Freddie Hartner tonight. If Hartner had been alone, they might have sprung the trap. Now there wasn't much chance. He had to do something about that in the future.

"You're out pretty late, aren't you, Joe?" asked Hammy Martin.

"Oh, I don't know. Young fellows like me have to run around a bit now and then."

Hammy grinned.

Pete Datronka emerged from the kitchen, wearing a greasy apron and carrying a pan full of glasses. He began stacking the glasses on the shelf behind the counter.

"How you doing, Pete?"

Pete turned and looked at Joe as if he hadn't noticed him before. "Long time no see," said Pete.

"Still washing dishes, I see, Pete."

"Yeah. I got a dozen jobs. Takes a dozen jobs for a man to make a living these days."

Pete, about thirty-five, was punchy from a brief career as a prize fighter. He had done a stint in the navy during the Korean war and had won the middleweight championship of his squadron. After service, he had taken up boxing—and had come home two years later, with bells ringing inside his head, and walking on his

heels. He went on with his work.

"Any good news yet about your pension?"

"Naw," Pete said, "but I finally got a lawyer working on it. If he don't get me the pension he don't get no pay."

Pete had blamed his present condition on his navy service and had been trying to get a disability pension ever since his discharge—but had got nowhere.

Joe went back to the Plaza Bar. Fred Hartner and Sailor Turnesea were well tanked up by this time. Joe dropped into the booth beside Fred. Gus Haver came to the booth and stood there looking the two over. He shook his head at Joe. "Ever since poor old Hank Boyce was found dead they're getting crying drunk every night. It's 11:30, closing time. I got to get them home someway."

"I'll take care of Freddie. I know where he lives," Joe said.

"Okay," said Gus. "You do that. I'll take care of Sailor."

The dark-eyed stranger who had been playing pool was just leaving. "I'll take Sailor home if you'll tell me where he lives," he said.

"No," said Haver, "this is my responsibility. I'll see that he gets home."

"Hell," said the stranger, "you're letting this fellow take Hartner home. I just wanted to help."

"I know Chaviski, and I don't know you," Haver said.

"Name's Jim Deerfield. Traveling man. I'm in your town half the time. You ought to know me by now. I've spent enough money here."

"Sorry, my friend, but I prefer to take care of these old-timers my own way. Here's Pete Datronka. Pete, you know where Sailor lives. Get your truck and take care of him, will you?"

Pete swore half-aloud, but lifted Sailor bodily and headed toward the back door.

"Pete work here too?" Joe asked.

"Cleans up after we close," said Haver.

Old Fred Hartner wasn't nearly as drunk as he pretended to be.

"Dang it, Mister Joe," he said, "we could have got fixed up tonight if it hadn't been for ole Sailor Turnesea. That was the city slicker who was talking to Mister Boyce that night."

"What did he want tonight?"

"Just shooting the bull. And then he said he heard about Mister Boyce's death and he was sure sorry about it. He was alibiing about that book deal too, to cover up, I think. Said he had brought the book Mister Boyce was interested in down from Kansas City where he had his home, that him and Mister Boyce had talked about



it before. Said he took Boyce to his hotel room and showed it to him, after him and Mister Boyce had took me to my room stone drunk that night. Said his book wasn't the edition Mister Boyce wanted and they didn't make a deal, so he brought Boyce back and let him out on the corner in front of our rooming house. Said somebody called to Mister Boyce from around the corner as he let him

out of the car, but he didn't see who it was. They ain't nobody in the world who can prove any different either, Mister Joe. He's a real city slicker and you can't pin him down on nothing."

"We'll see about that," said Joe.

On the night of the third of the following month, Joe sat in his car, parked near the chili place, across the street and half a block away from Haver's Plaza Bar. Old Fred-

die Hartner, flush with his monthly pension check, was in the bar flashing his money around.

Sailor Turnesea again was with Hartner. Joe could hear them talking and drinking together in a back booth, by way of a radio pickup. The two old-timers were making plans to room together. The old sailor liked the proximity of Freddie's rooming house to the Plaza Bar. Everything they said, even the clink of the glasses, the gurgling of the beer, came clearly into the headphones which Joe was wearing. The pickup was through a transistor powered mike and transmitter taped to Fred's bony chest, inside his shirt. The two talked on and on. It was amazing to Joe how much enjoyment these two old codgers found in just being alive, in talking to each other and sipping beer together.

For thirty minutes they talked, and then a new voice cut in:

"Well whatta ya know! You two just live down here?"

"No, Mister Deerfield, just when we got money to buy beer. The Sailor here and me got our checks today. We're celebrating."

"Well, let me buy you two guys a beer and join in the celebration—"

Joe called the police department on his car radio: "This is Joe Chaviski. Send someone down to Ha-

ver's Plaza Bar right now and pick up Sailor Turnesea. Let Fred Hartner alone—drunk or not. Understand? And leave the guy with Fred alone. He's a fellow named Deerfield, and he may be our man. Understand?"

"Got you," said Station Control. "Ten Four."

Three minutes later Joe listened, grinning, as the motor patrolmen picked up old Sailor Turnesea. The sailor wanted to fight. Gus Haver got sore about it, too, and Deerfield had some sarcastic remarks about coppers, but Sailor went to jail, where he would be held for an hour or two and turned loose. Later, when he found out the reason for the pickup, he would shake the hands of the officers who "arrested" him, but now he was "cussing like a sailor."

After the rumpus was over, Deerfield and Hartner cussed the cops some more. Then came the pitch: "You look to me, Hartner, like a man who knows a bargain when he sees one."

There was a silence, and the clink of a glass.

"I say you look like a man who knows a bargain when he sees one," Deerfield repeated.

"I heard you. What you getting at?"

"How would you like to buy a watch that sells at two hundred

"dollars for only twenty-five bucks?"

"It's bound to be hot," said Hartner.

"Well, what do you want for twenty-five bucks? The crown jewels of England with a deed of sale?"

"I don't want to fool with no hot stuff."

"Go on! I didn't steal the watch. It's already been stole and I don't know who from or I would return it. Won't never get back to the original owner. I got it for a measly ten bucks from the man who did the stealing. You want it or not?"

"I might be interested," said Hartner. "Maybe I could pawn it for a little more than twenty-five bucks. Or maybe I can give it to a niece or nephew I got, for Christmas. Lives away from here. I'm aimin' to see them, come Christmas. What kind of watch is it?"

"Man's gold watch. And to make you feel better about it, I'm not sure it was stolen. The guy told me he won it in a crap game. I don't know any different from what he said."

"Okay, I'm interested then."

"All right, you stay right where you are. I'll see you later. I'm going to shoot some pool. When I get through we'll go to my hotel and get the watch. You got twenty-five bucks on you?"

"I got more than that. I got more'n fifty bucks right here in my pocket."

"Good. You wait right here. I'll see you in an hour or so."

Joe Chaviski grinned. Old Fred Hartner was playing it like a veteran. The old man had guts!

Time wore on. Hartner had another beer—then another. Joe got worried. He hoped Freddie wouldn't pass out on him.

Eleven o'clock came. Hartner was asleep now, with his head more than likely on the table. The heavy breathing had turned into snores. Joe was getting drowsy himself.

Then he could hear Deerfield talking and knew that Deerfield was shaking Hartner. "Sorry, old timer, sorry! I made a deal with another fellow. I'm getting thirty bucks for the watch. But I'll have something for you next month—something for both your niece and nephew."

"You welsher!" old Hartner answered him. "I wouldn't buy a thing from you now—not even the crown jewels of England—with a deed."

There was the sound of laughter, then various other noises. Chairs were being moved. Doors were shutting. Joe heard Gus Haver talking to Hartner, shaking him and urging him to go home,

but Hartner wasn't moving. Either he was drunk again or had some other reason for remaining.

"All right, Pete, I'm going. You take care of Hartner here. See that the old fellow gets home, will you? It's just across the street. You can carry him."

"Damn it, Gus, I know where he lives. I've carried him over there enough!" It was the voice of Pete Datronka.

Then all was quiet on the mike except for Freddie's half-snores and the distant sounds of Pete Datronka cleaning the place, banging chairs and tables together, sweeping and moving things. Gus had gone home. The Plaza Bar was closed for the night.

What the devil was keeping Hartner? Surely he wasn't that drunk! Then Joe heard Pete Datronka swearing as he picked Freddie up.

"Skinnier than ever!" Pete said. "Grieving yourself to death over that danged book-lover, Hank Boyce. Well, it won't be long before you're joining him."

Freddie mumbled something which Joe could not make out, but he could hear Pete grunting and he knew that he was carrying Freddie. Then there came the banging of a door kicked shut. Joe, watching with his head down low so that he would not be seen,

suddenly jerked upright, his face creased with worry. The door had banged shut, but Pete Datronka wasn't carrying old Fred out through the front door. He was leaving by the back door!

He heard Pete's old truck start with a loud racket at the rear of the Plaza Bar.

Joe's car shot forward, lights off. He turned the corner around the Plaza Bar and headed up Rogers Avenue. Pete's truck was moving westward a block ahead of him. Joe followed, his lights still off, while reporting his movements to the police by car radio.

Pete turned north into Third Street, crossed Main Street, turned west and rolled to a stop near a railroad loading dock behind a warehouse on North Second.

There was a sound like a sharp slap. It was repeated. "Wake up, Hartner! Wake up! Where the devil do you keep that money of yours?"

"Pete Datronka! It was you who killed Mister Boyce!"

Datronka laughed. "You're getting too smart for your britches, you old coot. Sure it was me. I heard him and that city slicker talking in the restaurant when I was stacking dishes. When that fellow brought him back to the rooming house that night from the hotel I told him I knowed where I

could find a first edition of the book he wanted—from old Granny Hughes—and he fell for it. Now give me your money, you old fool."

"Mister Chaviski! Mister Chaviski!" Freddie screamed. "You heard him. It was Pete Datronka who killed Mister Boyce—"

Freddie's cries ended with a squawk, and the mike went dead, just as Joe came to a jarring stop right behind the taillights of Datronka's pickup truck.

Joe leaped out, jerked open the door of the truck, and cracked Datronka's thick skull with a black-jack. The killer's iron hands loosened from Freddie Hartner's scrawny neck. Datronka fell out of the truck and into the alley, and blood poured from his head and more blood from his wrist.

"Did he hurt you, Hartner?" Joe cried.

"One half second more and you could have used my head for a football," the old man said, rubbing his neck. "He's got hands on him like a bear trap. But dang it, I broke my new set of dental plates when I clamped on his wrist."

"Tell me, Freddie," Joe said, as he rolled Datronka and slipped the cuffs on his wrists, "were you drunk again tonight after Deerfield left? Is that the reason you wouldn't get up and go home yourself when Gus Haver was trying to get you to?"

"No," said Freddie, grinning. "That Datronka has always been such a dirty, griping so-and-so, I was just drunk enough and mean enough to want to make him carry me home."

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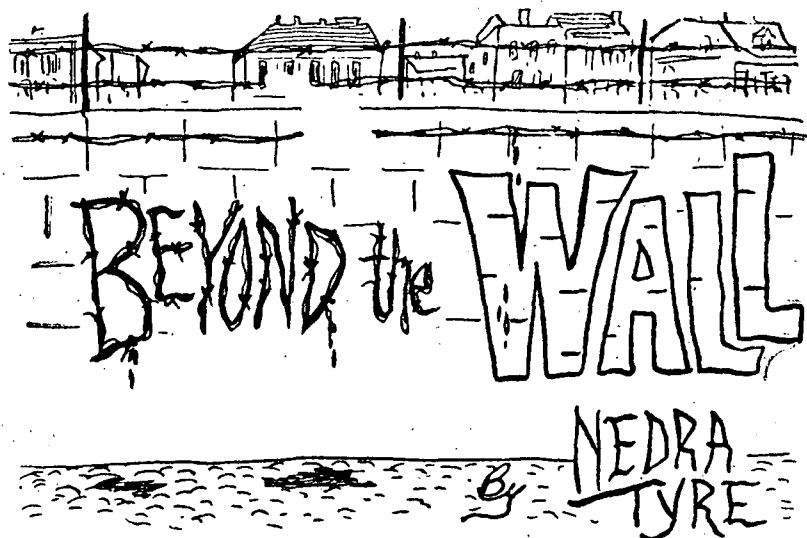
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I want to thank all of you for your interest.

Most sincerely,

Pat Hitchcock

Things either are what they appear to be; or they neither are, nor appear to be; or they are, and do not appear to be; or they are not, and yet appear to be.—Epictetus.



Poor dear, Ellen Williams thought, as she looked with pity at her new acquaintance on the high, narrow hospital bed. Because of all the dressings and splints and casts, Margaret Collins seemed to have more than the usual number of arms and legs.

For a moment Ellen had an attack of stage fright; she was supposed to entertain the injured woman. Margaret Collins' cousin, Anne Fitzgerald, had urged Ellen

to talk about her travels. "For years I've wanted you two to meet and now is a good time. Margaret has been so active that recovering from her injuries is terribly hard on her. Be an angel and go to see her. May I tell her you'll drop by for a long visit on Tuesday afternoon? Incidentally, Ellen, she's awfully fond of mystery and intrigue. She's a psychologist and keenly interested in peculiar behavior and crime. So if you've run into any of that on

your trips do tell her about it."

Figuratively speaking, Ellen Williams feared she had a limp bouquet of faded wildflowers to offer Mrs. Collins instead of the exotic blossoms of intrigue and mystery Anne Fitzgerald had suggested. Conducted tours, which were all that Ellen had ever taken, didn't lend themselves to mysterious happenings or attract exciting, provocative people. They catered to non-nonsense, middle-aged persons eager for their money's worth.

Anyway, here Ellen was, eager to do her best to divert the woman who had broken almost everything but her neck in an automobile accident.

"How nice of you to come," Mrs. Collins said, smiling at her slight, uncommonly pretty, plainly dressed, middle-aged visitor. "I'm eager to hear about your travels. I've always wanted to travel. Now I'm afraid I never will. But then if I'd really wanted to I'd have managed to travel long before this, wouldn't I? Don't we arrange to do the things that we want most to do?"

Mrs. Collins was a psychologist and must know what she was talking about. Even so, Ellen had to object. "I'm not so sure," she said. "To tell you the truth, I've had traveling thrust upon me. I'd never budge from Lexington if my sons

didn't insist that I travel. They don't believe me when I say I'd much rather stay at home. Now then, is there any particular place you'd like to hear about?"

"No. Anything will be nice."

Mrs. Collins' face wore the glowing expectancy of a child reaching out for a Christmas present. A sense of inadequacy made Ellen squirm in her chair. She was afraid that she would be a great disappointment to Mrs. Collins. All the same, she must do as well as she could, and her brain riffled through her travels.

Now that she put her mind to it, there was something unusual about the tour she took to Berlin in August 1961, a few days after The Wall went up. It was an exciting time, no question about it. The peace of the world was in jeopardy then.

Ellen Williams cleared her throat. "I'm ashamed to say. I'm not politically minded," she said. An apology was no way to begin. Well, she would have to tell it as it came to her. "I skip editorials and political columns, so I hadn't the slightest notion that a crisis was imminent when I took a tour to Germany in August 1961. I arrived in England a few days before the tour began and took some day trips around London.

"I was at Woburn Abbey when

an Australian woman started talking with me about the grave situation that had arisen on Sunday when East Berlin had been sealed off. I told her I was supposed to begin a bus tour the next day that would arrive in West Berlin on Friday. She said she was positive the tour would be canceled, that no reliable agency would take a group to West Berlin at such a critical time.

"But when I got to my hotel late that afternoon my mailbox was empty—there was no notice from the agency about any cancellation. So I had a light supper, took a bath, set my alarm and got up at six. I packed, had some tea, checked out of the hotel, hailed a taxi and went to Victoria Coach Station. I had allowed more than ample time. We were supposed to assemble at seven-thirty and I was the first one there.

"A young man hurried over to me. He said he was Alex, the courier for Tour 612. He asked for my name and checked it against a list on a clipboard. He said many people had become uneasy and canceled the tour; of the thirty-six persons who had booked it, all but eighteen had withdrawn."

Margaret Collins said, "You know, I don't blame them. I'd have been too much of a coward to go through with it. I like excitement

but at second hand, to read or hear about."

"No one there that morning seemed apprehensive. They were looking forward to the tour. Incidentally, it turned out that everyone but me was a British subject. I was the only person from the United States. A large, exuberant woman named Louise Willoughby, who had a brother-in-law on *The Times*, said he had predicted war in a fortnight because of *The Wall*, and he had called her a fool for persisting in going to Berlin. 'I booked this tour in January,' she said, 'and I intend to take it.' That was the attitude of everyone—to carry out what had been planned.

"Well, we got on a bus and headed for Dover. There we queued up and had our passports checked and boarded a steamer. The Channel crossing was miserable—so many passengers were terribly seasick. Luckily no one in our group was seriously bothered, though Mr. Mauldin, from the Midlands, looked queasy the first hour.

"We disembarked at Ostend. There was no bus waiting for us, and Alex, our guide, was obviously concerned. He tried not to show his misgiving. He said he would go find out about the bus, and meantime, as we had a long drive ahead, he suggested that we have some refreshments before we set

out. We explored the waterfront a bit and pushed our way inside a small, very crowded pastry shop and ordered coffee and cake.

"After we had eaten and left the shop, Alex wasn't in sight. Nor was there a bus anywhere with our tour name and number on it. We were muttering and mildly complaining when Alex rushed up to say that our driver had quit when he had learned we were going to West Berlin. He had understood that he was to drive only in West Germany; he had a wife and three little boys and had refused to take any unnecessary risk.

"Luckily a competent, more venturesome driver had been located and was then hurrying home for his clothes and toothbrush and would be back in a few minutes.

"Mr. Mauldin, the man from the Midlands, said that he didn't blame the defaulting driver a bit, and if he had nippers at home he wouldn't be heading for West Berlin and trouble either."

"Nippers," Mrs. Collins' tongue savored the word. "That's English slang for young boys, isn't it?" Somehow she manipulated her casts and splints and dressings so that she leaned more attentively toward Ellen Williams.

Mrs. Collins' responsiveness put Ellen on her mettle. How ought she to continue? How was she to

introduce the mystery? Because there was something mysterious. It couldn't have been her imagination, and yet it might have been—except for the last night. Even then it might have been the champagne. Yet what did the champagne have to do with it?

She mustn't let her mind canter ahead. She must hold it in check; present the bits properly and in sequence. What she must do now was to get on with the tour.

"After all that delay we were quite late in leaving Ostend and it had begun to rain. Robert, our new driver, a Belgian, whipped us through the rain as if he wanted to deliver us to our fate, whatever it was. We rushed through Bruges and Ghent to Antwerp, our first overnight stop.

"When we crawled out of the bus we were all very tired and almost starving. In the dining room the waiters were impatient and scowled over our lateness. The food they served was cold. My small room was shabby. There wasn't any hot water. When I climbed into bed I wondered, as I so often do when I travel, what I was doing in a strange country and why I had left home, and I promised myself that I was not going to take another trip as long as I lived."

That was enough about her own feelings. It was time that Ellen

mentioned Mrs. Brown. She was telling things as they had happened, and she hadn't been aware of Mrs. Brown until the second day.

"The rain hadn't let up at all by morning, but we were all cheerful enough and Robert soon got us to Holland. We drove through Breda and Tilburg and then stopped at Hertogenbosch for coffee.

"I can't remember the name of the town where we had lunch. Anyway, the restaurant had set aside for us a long table with places for twelve and some smaller tables. I plopped down at the large table and then I noticed a woman sitting alone. She was wearing dark glasses and a hat with a rather wide brim. I thought how unpleasant it was for her to be alone, so I rose and went over. I asked if I might join her, thinking she would welcome me. She gave a slight nod. I told her my name and said I was from the United States. She didn't answer. Then I said something about our having had more than our share of rain. By then we had been served soup. She finished hers hurriedly and got up and left. I thought she must have been taken ill suddenly. Then I realized that she didn't want to sit with me. I felt snubbed and embarrassed by her behavior."

Mrs. Collins, the perfect audi-

ence, nodded in agreement. "I should think you would have felt like that," she said. "There you were on a pleasure tour and someone had behaved in a very rude and abrupt way."

"As soon as lunch was over we got back on the bus. Mrs. Brown had been sitting directly behind me, and when she got on I had already sat down. She walked by and I glanced up in case she looked in my direction or stopped to make some explanation of why she had left the table. She looked straight ahead. She completely ignored me."

"Was she rude to the others?"

"Well, you see the others weren't traveling alone as I was, so maybe they didn't notice. I never did mention Mrs. Brown to anyone and no one mentioned her to me." Perhaps that was where she had made a mistake. She should have discussed Mrs. Brown with the others, but—Ellen Williams wasn't a gossip. Yet what actually could she have told? Impolite behavior cropped up everywhere—tours and tourists were not immune.

"Do go on, Mrs. Williams."

"Again we were late in arriving at our overnight stop. By then we had crossed over into West Germany and were at Minden. Alex asked us to go directly to dinner and said he'd give us our room numbers and keys after we had



eaten. Our long ride had made us hungry and we enjoyed the food. The meal was a heavy one, typically German—soup, meat, potatoes.

“When we had finished, Alex was waiting in the lobby with the keys. I was the last one and Alex

was apologetic when he finally turned to me. He said no single room was available, that in fact only one room remained and Mrs. Brown and I would have to share it. There was a convention or a fair or something, and there were

no more accommodations anywhere in Minden. I looked around for Mrs. Brown, but she wasn't in the lobby. Alex said he had already explained the situation to her. I told him that sharing was quite all right and I understood that it was no fault of his. He thanked me for my attitude.

"Naturally I felt uneasy about Mrs. Brown. She had already snubbed me twice. It was perfectly obvious that she wanted to have nothing to do with me and I had no intention of thrusting myself upon her. I knew that my bag would be put in the room and I decided not to go up until bedtime. Mrs. Brown could have the room to herself until then.

"I sat in the lobby and wrote postcards. Then two of the group, very nice elderly sisters from Scotland, asked me to take a walk with them. We browsed at all the shop windows and even though it was quite late we found a place open with fruit for sale. It was so tempting that we all bought some. By then we had begun to yawn and realized that we ought to go to bed.

"When I entered the room I was surprised to find it empty. I thought Mrs. Brown would already have gone to bed. I undressed and ate some fruit. It was luscious but I couldn't eat it all.

"Well, Mrs. Brown could snub me again if she liked, but I wanted her to have the fruit that was left. I set two peaches and some grapes on a paper napkin and put them on the small bedside table for her. Then I took off my shoes and set them outside the door to be polished. After that I put on my nightgown. I turned out the light and pulled up the cover—one of those great feather comforts that literally smother you. I was sorry that I was anathema to Mrs. Brown—I pictured her sitting up in the lobby all night rather than share a room with me. Then I fell asleep.

"A shrill ringing woke me.

"I climbed out of bed to answer the telephone. A man with a charming, quite heavy accent greeted me in English and said breakfast would be ready in half an hour. I looked at the bed next to mine. Mrs. Brown was in it, her face hidden by the covers. She had crept into the room sometime during the night without disturbing me.

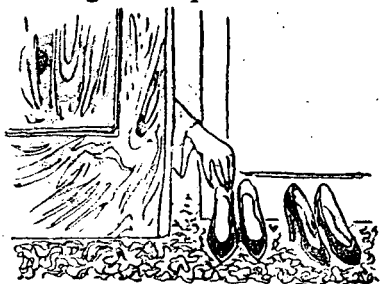
"I was sure she had been aroused by the bell and I said, 'Good morning. That was our call to get up. Breakfast is at seven-thirty.'

"Mrs. Brown moved slightly. She said nothing.

"I felt gauche and out of place, which was stupid, wasn't it? The room was as much mine as hers:

Anyway I hurried to dress. I intended to get out as quickly as I could. I hadn't unpacked the night before and I had only to shove my nightgown in my case. Then I set the case outside for the porter to pick up.

"When I grabbed my pocketbook I noticed there were two peach seeds and some grape stems on the table next to Mrs. Brown's bed. She might not speak to me but she



at least had eaten the fruit. Somehow that made me even more upset.

"I was dressed except for my shoes. They were waiting newly polished for me in the hall. In my stocking feet, I left the room. Two pairs of pumps, almost identical, were placed near the door. I put mine on and started toward the stairway.

"Suddenly I was in great pain. My feet were killing me. Traveling must have made my feet swell. I couldn't walk another step. I looked down and realized that in my confusion and anger I had put

on Mrs. Brown's shoes instead of my own. Both pairs were black calf with sensible heels—the great difference was that Mrs. Brown's were much smaller than mine.

"I changed into my own shoes and went downstairs.

"At breakfast everyone was excited. This was the day we were to drive from Helmstedt through the narrow corridor across East Germany into West Berlin. Alex told us he had telephoned late the night before to his representative in West Berlin. In spite of the tension, there didn't appear to be any immediate danger. Hopefully our tour would proceed as scheduled.

"As I talked with Alex and some of the other tourists about the adventures the day's run might bring, I had almost forgotten about Mrs. Brown. I hadn't seen her at breakfast. I was aware of her again when she walked down the aisle of the bus, but I purposely looked out of the window when she passed by and sat behind me. I became angry all over again at the memory of her rudeness.

"Rain dogged us for a time but when we reached Helmstedt and our first East German checkpoint the sun shone wanly. A great pole swept down to bar us from the autobahn. Propaganda posters with photographs of Ulbricht were plastered around and about. Lining the

highway on each side of us were tall barbed wire fences.

"After we had sat waiting for half an hour, two men boarded the bus and checked our passports. Alex and Robert got off with their credentials and entered a wooden hut. Their clearance was more involved than ours. At last we were allowed to progress a short distance to another barrier; after an additional check there, we were permitted to proceed. All along the road at short intervals we saw watchtowers from which soldiers and guns leaned out like gargoyles jutting from a gothic cathedral.

"The road was clogged with traffic and we often had to slow down. Occasionally we met busloads of tourists headed toward West Germany. They waved or gave us the thumbs-up sign. American and British army trucks swept past; some were on their way east, some west. The high barbed wire along the road fenced off vast fields under cultivation; men and women farm laborers were leaning close to the ground, working hard, a few yards beyond us; they didn't raise their heads to watch us go by. Hops grew on the barbed wire in places and hid its ugliness.

"The distance from Helmstedt to West Berlin is about a hundred and ten miles. It seemed measureless. At last we submitted to a final

Communist clearance and soon afterward we saw a sign welcoming us into the American sector of West Berlin.

"Our destination was just ahead. Some of the tourists got up and took hand luggage from the overhead racks. Others put on their coats. I wanted to tidy up for our arrival. I reached in my pocket-book for my lipstick and compact. When I opened the compact I must have held it rather high; the mirror captured the face of Mrs. Brown in the seat behind me.

"I've never seen such despair on a countenance. Hers was the face of a mother holding a dead child. It was the face of a person having her last lucid moment before she descends into madness, or of someone headed for the gallows. It was so appalling that I forgot about my makeup. I snapped the compact shut to blot out that vision of utter misery. I felt like an intruder. I had stumbled on something not meant for me, and I was angry at myself for having been angry at Mrs. Brown.

"I was so stunned by Mrs. Brown's desolation that I had not been paying attention to what we were passing. To distract myself I glanced out of the bus window. My first impression of West Berlin was that it seemed brand new; every building might have been fin-

ished that instant for our benefit.

"Our hotel also looked spanking new and was very attractive. The large lobby was pleasantly furnished; the restaurant directly off the lobby was light and inviting.

"As soon as I had unpacked I went out for a walk. The hotel was in the middle of town. The zoo was nearby and very tempting. I'm crazy about zoos. I paid my entrance fee and wandered around. There was no atmosphere of crisis. Parents and children were enjoying themselves, the animals and the sunny afternoon. The open air restaurant was filled with people. A band played waltzes. A little train rushed by jammed with waving, joyously screeching children.

"After a while I left the zoo to saunter along the street. Just across the way was Kurfurstendamm, the heart of the shopping district. I walked into KaDeWe, a big department store, and bought some gifts for my daughters-in-law. The shoppers looked like shoppers everywhere, and so did the salesclerks. There was no feeling of alarm or apprehension, no hysteria. It seemed simply a nice afternoon in August in a carefree city.

"I had dinner early and ate alone. I saw none of my group in the restaurant. I had almost forgotten my concern over Mrs. Brown. Perhaps I had exaggerated her un-

happiness. All the same, I was deeply sorry for her.

"The next morning after breakfast Alex and Robert took us on a sightseeing tour of West Berlin. We saw the Funkturm and the Le Corbusier Apartments. We drove through the Tiergarten past Congress Hall and out to Charlottenburg Castle. We stopped at Spandau Prison and Templehof Airport and the Town Hall and Free University.

"When Robert put us out at the hotel, Alex asked us to hurry with our lunch as we were scheduled to go into East Berlin at one-thirty.

"We marched immediately into the dining room, but once we were served we couldn't eat; our excitement was too high. Mrs. Willoughby—she was the one, you'll remember, whose brother-in-law worked for the London Times—said it was all touch-and-go. She said, 'We must keep our wits about us while we're in East Berlin. Last night I went out to dinner with some British newspaper people and some Berliners. They all warned that the situation is explosive. Anything can set it off.'

"At that the sisters from Scotland said they weren't going. Mr. Mauldin tried to persuade them to change their minds. Their objections to his plea were so strong that they won him over, and he

said on second thought he wasn't going—it would be senseless to take such a great risk. There were other defections. For a while it looked as if Alex and Robert would be taking an empty bus into East Berlin.

"But our jitters subsided; our spirit of adventure soared again; by one-fifteen we had assembled in the lobby.

"A little later Alex counted us as he always did to be sure no one was ever left behind. Then he frowned. Someone was missing. We were seventeen instead of eighteen. Mrs. Brown was the absent one. We all looked at our watches. There was still five minutes to spare. We waited. On the dot Mrs. Brown joined us. Then Alex led us around the corner where Robert and the bus were waiting. Alex announced over the loudspeaker that when we entered East Berlin a guide would meet us. He said we were absolutely forbidden to discuss The Wall with the guide and under no circumstances were we to talk about politics.

"In moments we had approached the Friedrichstrasse checkpoint. Two East Germans entered and asked for our passports. Other uniformed men banded around outside opening the luggage compartments. One man crawled beneath the bus to search there. After a

while we were given permission to drive across into East Berlin. The bus might have become afraid; it lurched, then stalled, and finally bumped past the last barricade.

"Just beyond the barricade a slight young man wearing a raincoat hailed us. Alex opened the bus door and spoke some German. The man entered the bus and Alex introduced him as Hans, our East Berlin guide.

"Hans' smile was pleasant; his English was perfect; he said without any hint of irony that he hoped we would enjoy our visit.

"A light rain began to fall as we drove through the bleak, empty streets. After the sparkling newness of West Berlin, East Berlin was drab indeed. Everything looked gray—the streets, the buildings, the great open spaces, the clouds. Rubble from the bombings was everywhere. A feeling of tragedy was as heavy as the rain clouds.

"There wasn't any traffic. The dingy houses and blocks of flats seemed without tenants. At last we saw someone—a solitary man stood in a doorway, but he paid no attention to us. Farther on a woman glanced down from the balcony of an apartment house, but her eyes didn't register our existence.

"All the time Hans was commenting on East Berlin, giving

figures about population, area, industries, rents, wages, the standard of living. We crossed Unter den Linden, we saw the State Opera House and the State Library and Humboldt University. We passed Hitler's bunker. Somewhere or other we stopped at a kiosk and got postcards.

"Then we drove to Treptow Park. We stopped there, got out of the bus and followed Hans along a path to the Soviet War Memorial.

"The rain increased, splashed loudly as we strained to hear Hans' statistics about the number of Russian soldiers buried there and the height and material of the Memorial. Suddenly the rain was like a cloudburst. It routed us. We ran the long distance back to the bus. We were drenched and bedraggled as we jostled each other to climb inside. Mrs. Brown was just ahead of me as we entered the bus and my footsteps followed in the puddles left by her soaked shoes.

"Hans' composure didn't falter; he said we were quite lucky as our tour was over except for our visit to the Pergamon Museum. We'd be sheltered there, so it wouldn't matter whether or not it rained.

"The rain didn't slacken at all. It shrouded the bus windows, erasing East Berlin from our view. After a while the bus stopped and Hans said we had arrived at the

museum and could leave the bus.

"We rose. We were a forlorn group in our soaked clothes as we got out once more to brave the rain and dash through its downpour.

"The building ahead of us had the austere exterior of museums everywhere, yet we ran toward it as to a haven. It was very dark inside. There were none of those dramatic spotlights that so many museums have. In fact, there was no illumination of any kind. Hans was ahead commenting, giving facts in a subdued voice as if he were in a church. The stragglers in our group rushed to catch up with him.

"I was about to follow when someone touched my shoulder. I turned to see Mrs. Brown. Her hat shaded her face. Drops of rain splashed from the hat brim to the floor. A strange smile was on her face. I can't describe it—it was a thin, forced smile, and do you know I didn't dare look into her eyes because I was afraid I would discover in them that unbearable sadness I'd seen as we were approaching West Berlin.

"She began to speak. 'Thank you for the fruit,' she said. 'It was delicious. I enjoyed it so very much.' Her voice was a whisper, as if she entrusted me with a secret that no one must overhear.

"I was startled. I was quite put off. I boomed out, 'You're quite welcome.' My voice echoed in the long corridor.

"I was afraid. I felt alone even though Mrs. Brown was beside me. The others had disappeared. I desperately wanted to be with them. I looked to the right. The group hadn't entered that room. I crossed to the left. They weren't there. I rushed ahead and came upon a vast hall. I was relieved to see the others and ran over to listen to Hans talk about the Hellenistic culture of Pergamon.

"Then I paid no attention to Hans. All I could think of was how odd it was that Mrs. Brown had thanked me for the fruit. Why, Mrs. Collins, did she thank me then?"

"It certainly wasn't the first chance she'd had by any means."

"No. She'd sat behind me for hours on the bus. She could have leaned over at any time to thank me. She'd been with me in the bedroom that morning after she'd eaten the fruit and hadn't said a word about it. Why would she have mentioned the fruit there in the museum? Why then?"

"People are unaccountable. Maybe she was suddenly overtaken by remorse that she hadn't thanked you before."

"But don't you agree that it was

out of character and very odd?"

"Very odd indeed."

"Well, anyway, the Pergamon Museum was the end of our tour in East Berlin. Hans stayed on the bus with us until we approached the checkpoint. Then he waved goodbye and disappeared in the rain. We all felt sad to leave him in that stricken city. We liked him.

"At the barrier we underwent the same procedure as when we had entered East Berlin, only this time it was infinitely more strict and meticulous. The Vopos or whatever they're called scrutinized our faces and compared them with our passport photographs with greater care. They searched the luggage compartments and beneath the bus even more thoroughly. They conferred with each other, checked, rechecked, then went through the whole tiresome business again.

"Finally the nod was given; we were allowed to cross back into West Berlin.

"Our stay in East Berlin had left us depressed. We were silent, stunned. As we were passing the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in the swarming traffic of Kurfurstendamm, Mrs. Willoughby spoke for us all. She said, 'I was never so glad to get out of a place in my life. East Berlin is one vast prison now. You see, until last

Sunday the inhabitants knew that if things got too bad they could take an S-train or the underground into West Berlin and be free. It was their safety valve. Escape was always possible until Sunday. But there's no hope any longer. Only terrible risk. They'll be shot if they try to leave. Well, it's all too upsetting and doesn't bear thinking about. Once I get out of these wet clothes I'm going to have some strong tea.'

"'Right you are, Mrs. Willoughby,' Mr. Mauldin said. 'But I'm going to have something stronger than tea as soon as I can make myself presentable.'

"We made a shabby parade across the lobby in our damp clothes as we hurried toward the elevator. By the time I got to the elevator there was no more room in it. I backed away to wait for its return. While I waited I glanced at some newspapers for sale at the front desk. I skimmed the headlines. They were all in German and I could make nothing of them. I sauntered back toward the elevator. By then the indicator was flashing red and descending. I looked across the lobby and saw Mrs. Brown sitting alone on a sofa. Obviously she was quite comfortably settled and in no rush to go upstairs to change. Then the expression on her face startled me—stopped me dead. Mrs. Collins,

I believe the word that would best describe her is gleeful—she was, well, smug. Then she gave a great roar of laughter. I couldn't believe it. I knew that no one else in our group would find anything to laugh at so soon after what we'd seen—a whole dead city. I decided that Mrs. Brown must be amused by something in the lobby, but nothing laughable or even remotely diverting was going on there.

"Mrs. Collins, from what I've said of that ghastly afternoon can you think of any reason why Mrs. Brown should have been so delightously happy?"

Mrs. Collins inspected her bandaged elbow as if it might give an answer. Her brow was ridged by deep thought. "I don't know whether I'm right," she said. "But this may be the answer. You see, people respond in different ways to the same situation. The majority of you were depressed, but Mrs. Brown was happy over her experience in East Berlin, I guess I really mean that she was thankful. She had seen all that misery and realized how fortunate she was. Whatever private sorrow she had known that had upset her so when you were entering West Berlin had seemed of no importance to her once she found out what the people in East Berlin were having to endure."

"Maybe so. Yet I don't think it was gratitude she was showing. She looked triumphant. Why, she was gloating.

"Anyway, our short stay in West Berlin was almost over, and you can't imagine the relief we felt when we drove back to West Germany the next day. We had an enjoyable afternoon and night in Goslar, then we went to Rudesheim. Mrs. Brown was no longer aloof. Twice I sat by her at mealtime and she talked as much as anyone, and she would nod to me when she passed by on her way to the seat behind me on the bus. But in Rudesheim she dismayed me again. I found some beautiful peaches there in a fruit stall. I've told you how fond I am of fruit. I overtook Mrs. Brown on the street. I remembered that she liked peaches, and held out the bag to her.

"No, thank you," she said.

"I insisted. There were more than I could eat and I knew she liked them. 'Please take some,' I urged.

"You're very nice to offer them to me," she said, 'but I'm allergic to peaches.' I hope I didn't show the amazement I felt. Mind you, she'd eaten the other peaches I'd given her a few nights before.

"Anyhow our tour was ending and there wasn't much more time to be surprised by Mrs. Brown's

behavior. After Rudesheim our route lay along the Rhine to Koblenz and then to Bonn. After Bonn we crossed into Belgium and went through Liege to Brussels, our last stop.

"That last night in Brussels, Alex was exuberant. He said we ought to celebrate the end of our tour. We agreed with him and decided to go to a nightclub—that is, everyone except Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Willoughby, who said they were much too tired.

"The floor show wasn't very clever and the champagne was only so-so. No matter, the evening was fun and we didn't want it to end. None of us were likely to meet again and we wanted our farewell to last. Alex was especially mellow. He said it was the first tour he had ever conducted in which there had been a serious threat of danger and he had been frightened when we went into East Berlin. In fact, he had been uneasy all during our stay in West Berlin. Our coming through unscathed called for more champagne. We toasted Alex. Alex toasted us. We were happy and pleased with ourselves.

"And we got back to the hotel very late.

"Mrs. Brown's room was next to mine and there to greet me outside the door were her sensible black pumps waiting to be polished.

They reminded me that I should place my pumps outside too. I unlocked my door and went to the closet for the shoes and set them near Mrs. Brown's. Then I went back into my room, double locked the door and got into bed.

"Suddenly something struck me as being very odd. Something was peculiar. No, it wasn't the champagne that was bothering me.

"I got up and unlocked the door.

"Mrs. Brown's shoes were bothering me. There they were, side by side with my shoes, and they dwarfed mine. But my shoes were *larger* than Mrs. Brown's. I remembered very well that they were *much* larger. In the mixup when we had shared the room in Minden and I had put on her shoes by mistake, my feet had been cramped. I couldn't walk in her shoes.

"I leaned down and picked up Mrs. Brown's shoes. I put them on. They were so loose I couldn't have kept them on if I had tried to walk in them.

"I was startled by a noise in Mrs. Brown's room. I had just stepped out of her shoes and set them back when she flung the door open.

"For an instant the champagne made me see two of Mrs. Brown. Two very formidable twins.

"'Hello,' I said. 'I hope I didn't disturb you. We've just got back from our party and I was setting

my shoes outside so they could be polished.'

"Both Mrs. Browns smiled at me. Both were friendly and polite. 'I hope you had a nice time,' they said. 'Good night.' The door was closed.

"I felt quite dizzy. I managed to get back inside my room. The floor tilted slightly. I grabbed the bed and climbed into it.

"I slept perfectly and woke completely refreshed. Everyone who'd gone to the party felt the same way. The champagne had done us all a world of good. That afternoon the Channel was choppy when we crossed over to England. It didn't bother us at all. A bus waited for us at Dover and we drove to London, talking our heads off about our exciting tour. In the coach station we gathered our bags and souvenirs and lined up for taxis. I had a rather tight schedule to get to London Airport for my New York flight and so Alex and Mr. Mauldin put me into the first taxi available. Then everybody waved one last goodbye to me and the one whose smile seemed warmest and who waved most energetically was Mrs. Brown. I've never seen such a remarkable change in anyone in all my life. You're a psychologist, so please explain it to me. It's been my experience that people don't change."

"You're right, Mrs. Williams. People don't change. Even a person who undergoes the rigors of psychoanalysis doesn't change. He learns more about himself and modifies his behavior, but essentially he's the same."

"All the same, Mrs. Brown changed completely."

"Then there has to be an explanation. However farfetched something seems to be, it can be understood when all the facts are examined."

"All right. We both say that people don't change, but you have my word for it that Mrs. Brown did."

"Yet you've said that no one else on your tour noticed this change."

"I was the only one who had the chance to notice. I shared a room with her. I saw the despair reflected in her face when we entered West Berlin. I—"

"You stood in her shoes twice."

"I may have been mistaken about her shoes that last night. Remember, I'd had a lot of champagne. But whatever the size of her feet, her *behavior* altered so much that she was as different as day and night. Why she didn't act like the same person at all when we got back from East Berlin. She might have been two different women."

Ellen Williams' statement possessed the room; its impact left a profound silence. The two women

looked at each other while the truth shone in Ellen Williams' eyes just as it lighted the eyes of Margaret Collins.

"That's it, Mrs. Williams! That's it exactly. There were two Mrs. Browns. One began the tour in London and stayed with it until you went beyond The Wall into East Berlin. The other Mrs. Brown came out of the Pergamon Museum and completed the tour. One Mrs. Brown had small feet, the other had large feet. One Mrs. Brown liked peaches, the other was allergic to them. One Mrs. Brown knew she was changing places and would have to stay in East Berlin or somewhere else behind the Iron Curtain, and that's why she was so despondent when you saw her face reflected in your compact. The other Mrs. Brown was gloating there in the hotel lobby in West Berlin because she had escaped, and of course she wasn't in any hurry to go upstairs to change her clothes—she wasn't wet. She'd been inside the Pergamon Museum during the downpour, waiting for the other Mrs. Brown to appear."

"But of course," Ellen Williams said. "How stupid of me not to have realized that. If I'd only known what was going on I could have saved the first Mrs. Brown."

"Not at all. There wasn't any possible hope of that. The first Mrs.

Brown was beyond your help before you had a chance to notice the differences between them."

"I suppose they were both spies," Mrs. Williams said.

"Of course not," Mrs. Collins replied. "If they had been spies the exchange would have been as smooth as silk and you'd never have been allowed to notice such discrepancies in shoe sizes or tastes for fruit, and the first Mrs. Brown wouldn't have been despondent—if she'd been a spy she'd have been doing a job she relished and was getting good money for."

"Are you suggesting the first Mrs. Brown was kidnapped while we were at the Pergamon and someone else took her place?"

"By no means," Mrs. Collins answered. "It was planned well ahead of time and the first Mrs. Brown was perfectly aware of her fate. It involved some kind of moral blackmail she was forced to pay lest the lives of her family be forfeited, and in carrying it out she had been warned to remain inconspicuous and to form no friendships on the way to Berlin. If she had become

friendly with anyone and talked a lot, it would have been obvious on the way back to London that a substitution had been made. That was why she was rude at lunch when you joined her. It was also why she stayed out of the room you had to share, and didn't mix or mingle with anyone. Then in the darkness of the Pergamon just before she changed places she felt there was no longer any danger of her betraying the switchover, and that's why she thanked you for the fruit. She was grateful for your kindness and sorry she hadn't been able to express her gratitude before."

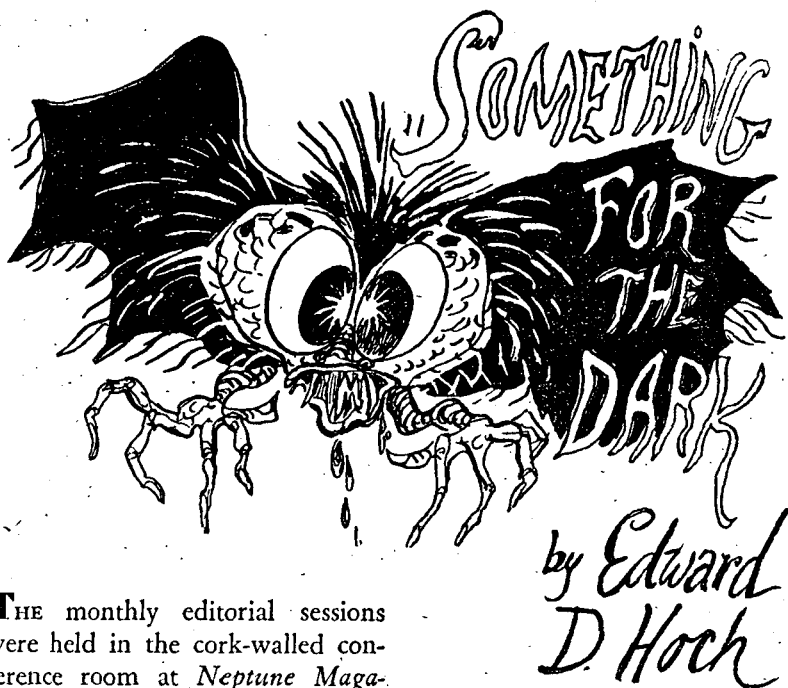
"And I didn't once suspect anything sinister!" Ellen Williams said.

One must always be suspicious, for the world is an evil place, Margaret Collins almost answered, but then she decided if Ellen Williams had reached middle age without grasping that fundamental fact, her naivete and innocence ought to be preserved.

Besides, the world could be a nice place, too, particularly when it offered a new acquaintance as pleasant as Ellen Williams.



One may frequently encounter a strange creature believed to be familiar.



THE monthly editorial sessions were held in the cork-walled conference room at *Neptune Magazine*, and for Steve Foley they were often the most interesting part of the office routine. He hadn't yet been on the *Neptune* editorial staff long enough to be bored by the individual mannerisms of the dozen or so men and women who lounged about the massive oak table, and it was one of the few times during

the month when he felt he was actually contributing something toward the finished product on the printed page.

Steve was still under thirty when he'd joined *Neptune* a year earlier. In his position as associate feature editor he was surprised even to be included in the editorial planning

sessions, but Mike Eldon, ashen-haired editor-in-chief, was a man who liked to have a full staff around the polished oak table. He'd brought the magazine a long way since the day when it was founded as "a monthly compendium of fable, fashion and food for those who travel the seven seas." Today *Neptune* devoted more space to fact than fiction, and most of it was likely to take place on solid ground. If its emphasis was still on "the adventure of travel," both "adventure" and "travel" were interpreted in their broadest meanings.

"People," Mike Eldon said, hitting the polished surface with his fist, "that's what the readers care about, and that's what sells copies. No more stories about some mountain in the Andes. Now we do stories on the people who climb that mountain!"

It was a stock speech, and he repeated it in some form or another at almost every meeting, but no one could deny that it was mainly this philosophy which had helped boost *Neptune's* lagging circulation from 875,000 to nearly two million in three short years.

"The October issue," Mike Eldon said, tapping the table with his rubber-tipped pencil. It was still early summer, but in the magazine business you always live in the future.

"Halloween. You know, something for the dark."

Steve Foley raised a finger. "I've got a funny one on my desk right now. Came in from an agent. A man and his wife, on a camping trip a few months ago, claim they were attacked by some sort of great winged creature that even carried off their dog." He'd been about to reject the thing, but now it just might have possibilities.

Eldon frowned down the table at him. "That's a bit out of *Neptune's* line. Still, it might be what we're looking for." He turned to the art director. "Harry, could you do a full page, in color, of a winged creature? A *great* winged creature? With red eyes, maybe? Probably something like those old illustrations of the Jabberwock in *Through the Looking-Glass*. Was it a Jabberwock by any chance, Steve?"

"I'm just as skeptical as you are, but do you want something for October or don't you?"

"I want something our readers will *believe*—at least enough to scare them a little." He sighed and stopped tapping the pencil. "All right, what the hell! Look into it, Steve. Talk to the people and see if there's any truth at all in it. You've got ten days before we lock up the issue. If it looks good to you, we'll run it. But take a cam-

era along. Get some pictures of where it happened—whatever it was.”

That was how it started.

Steve Foley phoned the agent who had submitted the article, a little Frenchman with a slight accent who worked out of his apartment on Central Park West. “Pete, this is Steve over at *Neptune*.” Everyone called him Pete, because it was easier than trying to pronounce his real name. “It’s about this flying creature article you sent us, by a fellow named Walter Wangard.”

“Oh, yes.”

“What do you know about him? Any truth to it?”

“I couldn’t tell you. He’s written a few outdoor items—hunting, fishing, camping. I think I’ve sold two or three for him. I’m not getting rich on it.”

“Ever met him? Is he a phony?”

“Doesn’t seem like it from his letters. He and his wife live in a little town near the Pennsylvania border, not far from where they saw the creature. He’s a tire salesman, but he likes the outdoors.”

“I guess I’ll have to go see him,” Steve said.

“You’re going to buy it?”

“Probably, if they’re not complete nuts. I want to get some pictures too.”

“Want me to go along?” the agent offered.

“Not necessary. Just let them know I’m coming. I’ll drive over this weekend, maybe.”

He left early on Saturday morning while the summer heat still smoldered unleashed. He was half-way across New Jersey by ten o’clock, and was pulling into the Wangards’ driveway at noon. Their house was a little white frame place in a little white frame town, sleepy in the summer except when the city cars drove through on the way to the lake. There was a church across the street, and a wedding was in progress. Steve stood for a moment watching the clouds of colored confetti shower down on the squealing bride and happy groom. Some things were the same everywhere, he decided, and lit a cigarette before turning toward the white frame house.

He had time for just a few puffs before he discarded it and pressed the doorbell. The woman who came through the dim livingroom to the latched screen door was younger than he’d expected, with long blonde hair and a good figure. He guessed her to be about his own age, certainly no more than thirty. “Hello. I’m Steve Foley from *Neptune Magazine*. I believe your husband is expecting me.”

“Oh, yes, Mr. Foley.” He stepped

in as she unlatched the door. "This is quite a treat for us, having an editor drive all the way from New York. I'm Lynn Wangard, Walt's wife."

As if on cue, her husband appeared, tucking the ends of a clean sport shirt into his pants. He was what Steve might have expected—medium height, running just a bit to overweight and thinnish hair, with a ruddy complexion that reflected the outdoor life in a summertime along the Pennsylvania border. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Foley," he said briskly. "My agent told us to expect you."

Steve sat down, trying to feel at ease, telling himself that they seemed friendly enough, yet feeling oddly bothered by something. "We're seriously considering using the account of your experiences in the October issue," he told them. "We just wanted to talk to you in person and perhaps get a few pictures out where it happened."

Lynn Wangard gave a little shiver of anticipation. "We haven't been back there since. It was the most horrible thing that ever happened to me, in my whole life. It was almost like a dream, a terrible nightmare."

"Of course I've read your article," Steve told Wangard, "but I'd appreciate hearing it from your wife again, just briefly, to refresh

my memory a little bit, you see."

Walt Wangard smiled thinly. "Or to compare our stories? I assure you they agree."

"Walt!" She seemed to speak a bit sharply. "I'd be glad to tell him about it." Then, turning to Steve, she began. "Actually, it's a very short story. It was the middle of May, and it was the first time we'd been camping this season. The weather was good—a warm evening with lots of stars—but we'd chosen a camping spot a mile or so away from the main area. We don't have any children, and we're always just as happy off by ourselves, away from the other campers. Besides, our dog Jake used to bark a lot at night—you know, just baying at the moon like dogs are supposed to do."

"What kind of dog was he?" Steve asked.

She seemed startled. "A beagle. Surely that was in Walt's article."

"I'd forgotten." He lit another cigarette. "Sorry I interrupted you."

"Anyway, we were sitting around the little fire having a few drinks. Jake was off prowling in the underbrush somewhere, and there were the usual night sounds from the woods. I began to feel strange, and so did Walt. It's hard to explain—it was as if we were no longer alone there. All of a sudden the woods were menacing, the

trees seemed to take on a life of their own. There was a noise above us, a sort of flapping. I was frightened, but Walt thought it was just an owl."

"I was the first to see it," Walt said. "I can still remember those red eyes, as big as fists."

"I started to scream," Lynn Wangard continued. "I screamed and I screamed. It was a great scaly thing, with wings a good twelve feet across. It came crashing through the trees above us, all red eyes and dripping mouth. It was horrible . . ."

"No chance the other campers were playing some sort of a trick on you?" Steve asked.

"Mr. Foley, it was *alive*! Walt ran for the gun he'd brought along; a single-shot rifle he fooled around with sometimes. He fired once and was reloading when—when Jake ran up barking at the thing."

"Just where was it then?"

"Above our heads, in the low branches."

"Your bullet missed him, Mr. Wangard?"

He rubbed his stubbled chin, and thought about it. "No. No, I just don't think it hurt him. I have another rifle that I use for hunting, but I hadn't brought it that weekend. The single-shot gun is old and the sights are no good on it, but I do think I must have hit him.

At that range I couldn't miss."

"We could almost feel its breath on our faces," Lynn Wangard continued. "I don't know just what happened next, but suddenly Jake stopped barking and—and I guess the creature had him. The thing went away after that, and took Jake along."

"That's it," Wangard said. "That's the way it happened. We drove down the road to warn the other campers, but nobody else saw a thing. The sheriff got out of bed to chase around after it the rest of the night, but he didn't see anything either. We made the newspapers, though; even a paragraph on the last page of the *New York Times*. A week or so later an old widow with a farm near the spot reported that something was bothering her cows. Said they hadn't been giving as much milk lately. Thought it might be they'd been scared by our creature."

Steve hadn't bothered to take notes, because it had all been in the article. They seemed to be telling the truth, and even if they weren't, that wasn't really his concern. Mike Eldon's only stipulation was that they not be obvious crackpots or fakes. They seemed to be neither one. "Could I see the place, get some pictures?" he asked.

"We'll drive you over," Wangard said, getting to his feet. "It's only

about a forty-minute ride from here."

The wedding party from the church across the street had gone now, leaving only a tired janitor to sweep up the flecks of colored confetti. Steve sat in the back seat as they drove him down the main street of the town, across jolting railway tracks, and into the rich farmland of the countryside. It took just over a half-hour to reach the state park, a solid rise of timberland that cut through the oatfields and across the horizon like some unexpected curtain. The afternoon warmth had spread itself across the landscape, and here in the park even the Saturday bustle of playing children was muted by the heat. Only at the carefully supervised swimming pool did the noise level give evidence of youthful joy.

"It was out this way," Lynn told him as they turned off the main pavement onto a well-traveled dirt road. Some campers were in the area now, and they waved as campers will, perhaps expecting someone they knew. Finally Walt Wangard brought the car to a stop and they got out, under a great old oak that might have been standing in William Penn's day.

"That was the tree," Wangard pointed up at it. "The creature came down right about here and snatched up Jake."

Steve nodded and got out the little German camera he'd brought from the office. He snapped pictures of the tree, and pictures of Walt and Lynn by the tree, then general pictures of the area. The place seemed awfully harmless in the summer sunshine. "Do you have a photo of the dog that I could have?" he asked.

"I think there's one in our scrapbook—" Lynn began, and then suddenly choked off her words. Something had happened to her husband.

Walt Wangard had toppled against the tree, his face screwed into a mask of sheer terror. "No, no!" he muttered, clawing at the bark. "It's coming again, coming . . ." He screamed.

Steve felt the chill on his spine as he followed Lynn's terrified gaze to the treetops, but there was nothing to be seen. Perhaps they were all crazy. Perhaps the world was crazy. Steve shot one quick picture of the huddled man against the tree and then ran over to help Lynn with him.

"I can't understand it," she said, truly frightened now. "He's never been like this before."

"Let's get him into the car, away from this place."

Wangard was shivering, almost beside himself with fear, as they half-carried him to the car. Steve sat



with him in the back while Lynn turned the vehicle toward home. The day was no longer a sunny summer afternoon. Something cold and dark and unknown had thrust itself upon them.

Steve remained at a nearby motel

overnight, and on Sunday morning he phoned Mike Eldon at his home, filling him in quickly on the previous day's events. "The whole thing might have been an act for my benefit," he concluded, "but if it was, he did a damned good job of it."

"You think they really saw this creature?"

"Who knows? I talked with a few neighbors last night, and they confirmed the story as much as they could. The dog certainly did vanish that night, and it hasn't been seen since."

Eldon sighed into the phone. "What about Wangard? How is he?"

"All right. He'd pretty much snapped out of it by the time we got him back to the house. He can't understand what happened to him."

"You got some pictures?"

"Yes."

"It doesn't seem that you can do too much there. Might as well come back tonight."

Steve hesitated and then said, "I'd like to stay over one more night if the expense account can stand it. There's something strange about the whole business."

"All right. One more night."

Steve hung up and strolled out to the street. Townspeople, dressed up for church, hurried past. He watched them, then followed along for a ways until he reached the Wangards' street. Services were just letting out at the little church across from their house, and he waited on the sidelines until a youngish blond minister finished greeting his parishioners.

Steve introduced himself. "I was wondering about the Wangards' experience," he said, getting quickly to the point. "What do people think of it? How has it affected the town?"

The minister looked even younger than Steve, and he spoke with a touch of New England accent that seemed surprising. For a moment, Steve had forgotten that a good many men had followed Franklin's early path from Boston to Philadelphia. "They're good people," he told Steve, smiling up at the sun. "Whatever happened to them, whatever was out there, I believe they told the truth."

"But what does the town believe?"

The blond minister shrugged. "The Wangards are dismissed as harmless. The creature in the woods is only another form of flying saucer, after all."

"And how has this affected them?"

The minister seemed thoughtful. A woman passed and called, "Good afternoon, Dr. Reynolds!"

"Good afternoon, Sarah." The smile came automatically to his face, but lingered a bit longer than necessary. He was a pastor who knew his people. Then he answered Steve's question. "Oddly enough, I believe it has brought them closer together. It's no secret

that there was actually some talk of divorce before all this happened."

"I see," Steve said. Then, "What do *you* think it was, Dr. Reynolds? Not a flying saucer, certainly."

"No."

"The devil, perhaps?"

The blond minister smiled slightly. "Perhaps. I would never be one to deny it."

Steve Foley thanked him and strolled away. The sun was high in a cloudless sky, and he was thinking it would be a good day for a picnic.

He spent the afternoon with the Wangards, lunching on a rough wooden picnic table in the back yard. Walt seemed completely recovered from his seizure of the previous afternoon, and the three of them sat chatting about the town and its people.

"The woman who saw your creature," Steve said. "Is she worth talking to?"

"She never really said she saw it," Lynn said. "Just that something was bothering her cows. It could have been a small bear. We've had them in the area before."

"The woman's something of a crackpot," Walt agreed. "You'll get nothing you can use out of her."

Steve nodded. "Then I guess I'll get back to New York in the morn-

ing since my work's about over."

"You're staying another night?"

"It's a long trip back in the dark. I'd rather start in the morning."

He left them in the late afternoon, while the sun was still bright in the western sky. Back at the motel, he read over the manuscript from Walter Wangard once more, waiting until the sky began to turn a mottled, midnight blue. Then he got into the car and drove out to the park, to the camping area where Walter and Lynn Wangard had met their creature.

The place was different by dark, a silent world where only the occasional sounds of the night creatures intruded upon the subdued campers and stray lovers. Steve passed a few parked cars, pulled off the road into the shielding foliage, then found a parking space of his own near the big tree Lynn and Walt had shown him.

He took a flashlight with him when he left the car, but he didn't know exactly what he was seeking. It was just an idea, the beginnings of an idea . . .

Then he heard it, a great whirling of wings from somewhere above. The thing in the tree had been disturbed by his presence. He crouched against the trunk, shooting his flashlight beam into the upper branches.

Something flew down at him,

blinded by the light, but swerved away at the final instant, chasing its shadow back into the depths of the forest.

It was an owl—large and probably very old, but still an owl.

Steve relaxed a bit and directed the beam of light toward the ground. He began to walk in an ever-widening circle until he'd gone some thirty feet from the tree, in the direction away from the camp site. Then he dropped to his hands and knees to study the earth. Hard to tell after two or three months, but the soil might have been disturbed, the grass uprooted since its spring growth. Perhaps the breath of the winged creature had scorched it. Or perhaps . . .

Steve started to scoop the earth away with his hands, then went back to the car and brought a tire iron from the trunk. It took him ten minutes to funnel a hole a foot deep in the hard soil. That was all he needed. He'd found Jake, the missing dog.

He drove back into town then, not to the motel but to the little house across from the church, where Walt and Lynn Wangard lived. The place was in darkness when he reached it a little before midnight. He had to ring the bell four times before Lynn appeared at the door, her face a frightened

mask, pale and distorted in fear.

"Come quickly!" she gasped. "He's killed himself!"

Steve followed her up the stairs, close on her heels as she snapped on the lights. Finally, at the bathroom door, she flicked the last light switch and stepped aside. Walt Wangard was sitting on the toilet seat with his head and hands in the sink. He was bleeding from both wrists.

"Call an ambulance!" Steve shouted over his shoulder. "There may still be time to save him!"

She ran out and he heard her dialing for help. In a few minutes the rising siren of an approaching ambulance cut through the outer night. When they arrived with a stretcher, Steve had already managed to stop the bleeding from both wrists.

"I'm going with him," Lynn said. "In the ambulance." Her face was a twisted, frightened thing, hardly recognizable.

"Wait," Steve insisted. "I'll drive you to the hospital." His hand was heavy on her shoulder. He stepped onto the front porch and said a few words to the ambulance driver.

She was waiting when he returned to the livingroom, lit now only by a single shaded lamp. "Why wouldn't you let me go? Why?"

"Because we have to talk, Mrs. Wangard. We have to talk about

your monstrous winged creature."

She fumbled for a cigarette. "My husband's dying, Mr. Foley."

"Let's hope not."

She blew out the cigarette smoke, nervous, unsure of herself. "What do you want me to say?"

"I want the truth. I found the dog tonight, Mrs. Wangard. Where he'd been buried."

She sighed and stubbed out the cigarette in a sudden motion of resignation. "All right, all right. There never was a creature. Walt made the whole thing up for the story. He killed the dog and buried it. When you started asking too many questions he tried to kill himself tonight. Is that what you wanted to hear?"

"No," Steve said softly. It was almost over now, nearly at an end, and for an instant he wondered what he was doing there, standing in the dimly-lit livingroom of this little house and playing God. "There is a creature, Mrs. Wangard. There was one that night. Your husband saw it."

"What did you just tell those men who took him to the hospital?" she asked suddenly.

"I told them to pump his stomach," Steve said. He felt very tired. "To get out whatever you fed him."

"What are you talking about?"

"Mrs. Wangard, did you walk into the bathroom, find your hus-

band bleeding to death in the sink, and then *turn the light off* as you left? Is that what you want me to believe?"

"I . . ."

"You've been trying to kill him for two months, and I hope to God you haven't succeeded tonight."

For an instant he thought she would throw herself at him, perhaps clawing at his eyes with the unleashed fury of some jungle cat, but the moment passed, and the fight seemed to drain away from her face. She sank back onto the sofa and said, very quietly, "You really believe that?"

"You know a lot about drugs, don't you? Maybe you were a nurse once, or you have a boyfriend who's a doctor. Maybe you just read a lot. That night of the camping weekend you fed him a hallucinogen or psychedelic drug of some sort, didn't you?"

"You're doing the talking, mister."

"It might have been LSD, but more likely it was DMT—dimethyltryptamine—a more intense form that concentrates and compresses the hallucinations into a half-hour period. He might have done almost anything during that half-hour, even accidentally killed himself. As it was, he saw an owl or some other bird and imagined a great winged

beast. You told the same story, and even killed the dog and buried it to back up the tale. The way it worked out was just as good for your plans. He could be killed by the 'beast' at a later date, or a suicide could be arranged. Either way, you'd be in the clear. Of course he wrote the story about his experience, and then you had to wait. You didn't know what might happen, but I suppose you felt that its publication would strengthen your hand. Walt Wangard would be judged either a crazed suicide or the victim of some unknown creature, whichever way you wanted to play it."

"You figured all that out?"

"I had help. The thought of a drug crossed my mind the first time I read Walt's article. It sounded so much like an LSD-created experience. Even if I were right, though, it could have gone either way—either one of you could have administered the drug to the other, and then simply matched your story to the drug-inspired hallucination. But when Walt had his attack in the park yesterday, I knew. Drugs like LSD and DMT sometimes cause repeat hallucinations days, weeks, or months after the initial effects have worn off. Our visit to that spot triggered just such a reaction in Walt. Later, when I heard you two

had been talking about divorce before all this happened, I had a semblance of motive. What was it, money? I suppose you wanted it all, instead of just some alimony."

She wasn't looking at him. She was staring at the floor. "You're too late, you know. He's dead."

"If he is, you're in extra big trouble, lady. They'll find the sleeping potion or whatever it was in his stomach. They'll know you knocked him out before propping him up in the bathroom and cutting his wrists. After yesterday in the park, you figured you had to do something fast. The time seemed right for it, while I was on the scene to testify to his mental unbalance."

Steve had gotten to his feet, and she asked, "Where are you going now?"

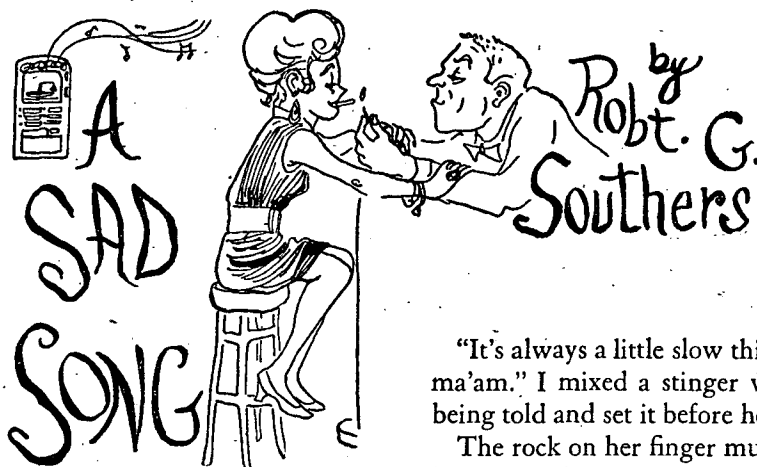
"To the hospital. To see how he is. Do you want to come?"

She shivered, curling into herself on the couch. "No. I don't think so."

He left her there with herself, because he was not a policeman. Someone would come for her later.

As he walked quickly out of the silent house and along the dark street, he saw a queer shape pass across the face of the moon. To some it might have seemed like a great winged creature, but he knew it was only a cloud.

People who play sad songs are often animated by analogous incentives.



IT WAS a dull, drizzly morning with little chance of becoming brighter, until Mrs. Lakes dropped by the club. This was the third day this week she had stopped in, and I was glad to see her. Mrs. Lakes was a mighty handsome woman.

She took her usual stool at the bar, which was a little disappointing. I couldn't see her legs from there; Mrs. Lakes had great legs.

"Good morning, Eddie." Her voice was like a caress. "Looks as if I have you all to myself this morning."

"It's always a little slow this early, ma'am." I mixed a stinger without being told and set it before her.

The rock on her finger must have been a good twenty carats. It nearly blinded me as she sipped at her drink. "Perfect. Just the thing for a rainy day."

I smiled. It was easy to smile at her.

"Will Mr. Lakes be coming in later?" I asked.

"Doesn't he always?"

She dug a cigarette case from her purse, giving me plenty of time to have a light ready. Her hand closed on mine to steady it needlessly, and she turned those big brown lamps on full voltage.

I felt as if I'd taken a jolt. Mr.

Lakes was a jerk in my book. If I had a woman like this at home, you wouldn't catch me hustling after those dames the way he does.

She blew out the match, never taking her eyes from mine. Her smile was cool and knowing. "Thank you, Eddie."

I turned from her, lifting a quarter from the till for the jukebox. Pete Fountain had a bevy of good numbers on the board, and I punched out a trio of his best.

Mrs. Lakes shook her head slowly as the sweet, lonely notes rolled from the speaker. "Why do you always play the sad songs?"

"Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought," I quoted.

"You read Shelley!" She seemed astonished.

"Why so surprised?"

"You just don't seem the type."

"Oh?" I wasn't really offended. People take a look at my nose that has been twice-broken, and the scar that bisects my left eyebrow and they are usually surprised that I can read at all.

"I didn't mean that the way it sounded." She laid her hand upon mine. "Please, don't be hurt."

I picked the cigarette from her fingers and took a deep drag. "Mrs. Lakes," I said, "you couldn't hurt me if you tried."

"I won't try." Her voice was

nearly a whisper; low, provocative.

We stood making love with our eyes until the record changed. The rain was harder now, otherwise it was very quiet.

She pushed her empty glass toward me. "Do me again."

I mixed her another and poured a cognac for myself. She watched silently as I came around the bar to perch on the stool beside her. She turned on the seat to face me, and those elegant knees touched mine.

"You're something of a mystery around here, Eddie. Do you realize that I don't even know your last name?"

"Bartenders don't have last names."

"There are all sorts of rumors about you floating around. Some say that you spent the last few years in San Quentin." She studied me closely. "That isn't true, is it?"

"No, ma'am," I said. "It was Folsom."

"Really?" For some reason, she was quite impressed. "Why were you sent away?"

"That's none of your business, Mrs. Lakes."

She looked away quickly. "Of course not. It was rude of me to ask."

I took a cigarette she offered. Again, she held on to my hand as I offered her another light first.

"Don't you have any family, Ed-

die? No one at all to care for?"

"I have an older brother. He hasn't spoken to me since I was sent up."

"You must be terribly lonely." She went back to her drink. "I know what that's like . . . being lonely."

I snorted through a cloud of smoke. "What could you know about it?"

"A great deal. Have you ever seen my husband, George?"

"Many times."

"Then, you know how he can be." Her voice wasn't soft any longer. "He swaggers around here like a king, boasting that nothing but the best is good enough for him. The best cars, the best clothes; he has the best of everything, except morals! You've probably seen him leave here with some of his—*pickups!*"

She fished a lacy handkerchief from her purse and dabbed at her eyes. "This is why I came to you, Eddie. I need a favor, and I don't know how to ask for it."

"You're doing fine," I said.

"Everyone says that you have a lot of contacts. They say that, for enough money, you can get a person just about anything."

"They do?"

"I want to hire someone who—*does away* with people."

I just stared at her. Somehow,

Mrs. Lakes wasn't so pretty now.

She watched me closely as I walked back behind the bar. "You know what I mean, Eddie."

"I know what you mean," I said, "but you don't know what you're saying."

"I know exactly what I'm saying." She rose from the stool; her eyes were nearly level to mine. "Do you know someone like that?"

I ground the cigarette against the ashtray. "I know someone."

"You'll arrange for him to get in touch with me?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Thank you, Eddie." She patted my cheek. "That's a favor I owe you, and I always meet my obligations."

I watched her walk away to the powder room. The poise and assurance had come back to her, but still she wasn't the same woman.

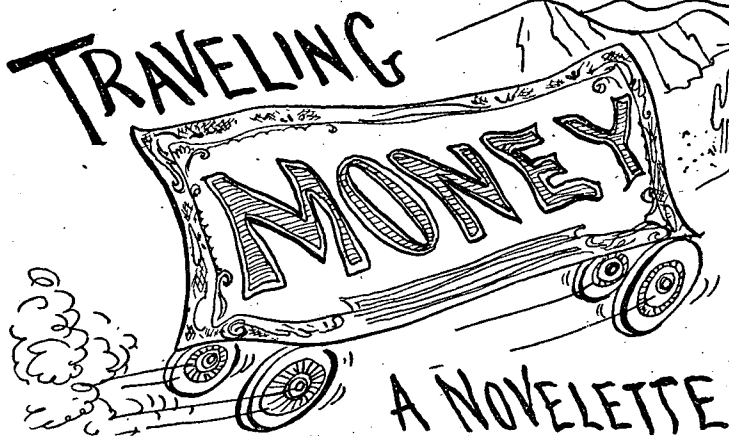
The beefy man in the expensive suit brought me out of my daze with an impatient snap of his fingers. He had just this second walked in, but still the service wasn't fast enough for him.

"Hello, George," I beamed. "The usual?"

He gave me a disgusted look and nodded curtly.

"Coming right up." I reached for the Scotch on the top shelf. Nothing but the best was good enough for my brother, George Lakes.

Can one go beyond his goal? Certainly . . .



TRAVELING MONEY

A NOVELETTE

IT WAS in the hospital in Vietnam that Arthur Derrick first heard the rumor about someone pinning a medal on him. There was talk of the Congressional. Captain Roberts was gung-ho to get the medal

for him. There might even be a trip to Washington, D.C., but Derrick was unimpressed. His wound had become infected and he was transferred to a stateside hospital where he stopped hearing the rumors. That was good. It allowed him to concentrate on worrying about his arm. He had heard plenty of stories about infection and how it got into a man's bloodstream and then someone would decide the only way to stop the spread was by removing a limb. Derrick wanted his arm. No one was going to saw it off. Who had



ever heard of a *one-armed* Acapulco beach bum making out?

Finally a busy doctor told him he was over the hump, the wound was healing, but there would be no more Marine Corps for him. The arm was going to give him trouble for a while, enough trouble so the Corps could no longer use him. He was to be given a discharge. Derrick smiled with relief. He wanted out. The hospital stint had got to him. He was restless. He needed a change of scenery.

It was a cloudless, hot summer day when the major handed him the paper that said he was a free man again. Outside the hospital Derrick stood on the sidewalk for a long time and soaked up the California sun. It was a great feeling. Then a voice called, "Derrick? Hey, over here."

Captain Roberts was in dress uniform, sitting behind the steering wheel of a long, shiny, new car, with suitcases and clothing heaped in the back seat. His grin was wide when Derrick dropped his forearms on the open window of the passenger side and looked in.

"I heard this was the big day for you," Harry Roberts said.

"How are you, Captain?"

"Hearty. Shoulder's going to be okay. I just got stateside two days

ago. Heading for Chicago. That's where my wife is. Got my discharge, too. By mutual agreement. I've had enough war. Where are you heading? Back to your native Texas?"

Derrick shrugged. "Right now I'm not sure. I'm a loner, Captain. Strictly. No wife, no girlfriend, no kin. I may just bop on down to Acapulco."

Roberts grinned. "That's right. Your ambition is to be a beach bum, isn't it?"

Derrick returned the grin. "Can you think of something better?"

"Being a *rich* beach bum, perhaps."

Derrick chuckled. "Wealth doesn't seem to be in my cards, Captain."

"Hell, boy, how do you know? Listen, you're footloose. How about going to Chicago with me? We can have a ball. Anyway, I want Lisa to meet you. You know, son, you're the only reason I'm alive today."

"Captain, any of the other guys would have done the same thing."

"Take on a Cong contingent single-handed? Maybe. But come on, hop in. You've got your suitcase. Let's go to Chicago. Trip's on me. This is a brand new heap. Let's see what it will do on the highway."

"Naw, Captain, I'd better—"

"Derrick, the cards could change for you in Chicago."

Derrick took time to light a cigarette. The inference tweaked.

"Sometimes," Roberts pressed, suddenly somber, "the fall of the cards depends on the dealer."

"Are you going to deal, Captain?"

"Who else?" His grin flashed again.

Derrick put his suitcase inside the new car. They rolled. Roberts was jocund. He kept the conversation idle and inconsequential, but Derrick was curious.

"What's the pitch in Chicago, Captain?"

Roberts shook his head. "Later, son. After we've been there a few days. I have to check out a couple of angles."

In Chicago, however, Roberts did not seem to be checking anything, but seemed perfectly content with lolling away the days and partying away the nights. He drank steadily during the hours he was awake, but he was careful, too. He never seemed to get drunk.

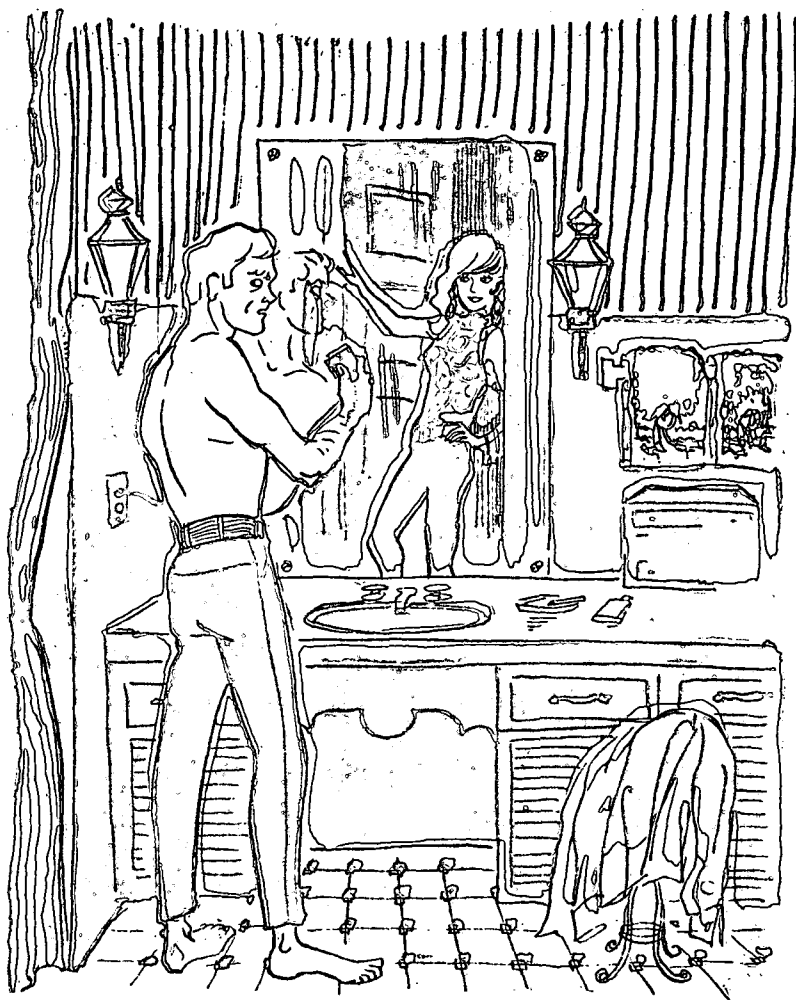
Derrick became impatient. "Captain, what about our deal?"

"I'm working on it," Roberts grinned. "In the meantime, how about you relaxing? Enjoy my home." He waved an arm that encompassed the luxuriant apartment. "Enjoy my friends."

Derrick was apprehensive. He had found the luxury pleasant, and Captain Roberts' friends were the kind of people to know, too. They were wealthy people, apparently influential, and someday they might help an ex-Marine if the ex-Marine ever needed to draw on acquaintance. Lisa Roberts was something else. Sensuous, meticulously groomed and clothed, fifteen years younger than Roberts, her voice and movements and glances were sleek as melted butter, her laughter was a low purr, and she wore a soft, sleepy, lazy look that belied a deep-seated restlessness inside. Derrick had thought her a smouldering opportunist in the instant of first meeting. Gray-green eyes had held his a few seconds too long, cool fingers had applied pressure—as if sending a message—and she had kissed Roberts too perfunctorily. Warning bells had clanged inside Derrick's head. Lisa Roberts was to be accepted with caution, to be held at bay. Lisa Roberts was danger, trouble.

On his fourth day in the apartment Derrick found her to be a first-class minx, too.

In the bath off the guest room, he was stripped to the waist shaving, when suddenly she was reflected in the mirror beside his face. She lounged in the doorway,



barefooted, her excellent figure emphasized by a white, sleeveless blouse and bright blue stretch pants. There was a suggestion of a smile at the corner of her painted lips, gold sparkles in her hair, and the gray-green, devil eyes were

roving him in speculative glances.

"I haven't," she said, "properly thanked you for bringing Harry back to me."

"Where is he now?"

"He went out to replenish the liquor supply." She entered the bath-

room. "Turn around now, Arthur."

He obeyed slowly, but she stepped forward, put her arms around his neck and kissed him on the mouth. Her lips were alive.

When she freed him she said softly, "There." Her look was drowsy; she used a red, pointed fingernail to trace the scar on his bicep. "Now make love to me."

"Why?"

"Because I like you. Because I want you to."

He picked her up, carried her into the bedroom, dropped her on the bed, then returned to the bathroom and his razor. Her reflection appeared in the mirror again. She was smiling.

"Thanks for the ride."

"Any time."

"Why did Harry bring you here?"

He continued to shave, said nothing.

"Harry is not like you. He never does anything impulsively."

"Beat it, doll."

She laughed throatily. "Well, I'm glad he did, Arthur Derrick. Because I'm going to have you. And soon."

The razor blade nicked his skin. A drop of blood sprouted on his jawbone.

Lisa laughed again. "Are you going to run, Arthur?" she teased.

"I can if I choose," he snapped.

"To where? I don't think you have enough money to run too far."

Then she was gone out of the doorway and Derrick had stopped shaving. He stared at the reflection of his face. The cut on his jaw was already beginning to dry. He was in a turmoil. Lisa Roberts was too desirable, too accessible. He had to put distance between them before there was trouble. There was almost five hundred dollars in his suitcase. He would head south, in spite of any plum Harry Roberts might have in mind for him.

Roberts protested. "Just when things are beginning to jell, boy? A couple of more days, perhaps three, that's all I need. There will be ten thousand dollars in it for you."

Derrick was appalled. "Ten thousand? I . . . don't understand. What's the pitch? What's—"

"You'll earn it."

"But—"

"Patience, son, patience."

Derrick was on edge, restless, mystified. Ten thousand dollars—Roberts had dropped the figure as if he had been talking about ten dollars. Roberts was being too vague, too casual. Derrick felt as if he should press; he should be told just *how* he was to earn ten thousand dollars. After all, he might not want to have a role in

Roberts' plan, not even for more.

That night there was a party in the apartment. The guests seemed to be important people. Derrick met some of them, shook hands perfunctorily, then attempted to fade into empty corners. He preferred to be alone, to be free to watch. He watched his host move from person to person, from cluster to cluster, as if he were cementing diplomatic relations. Were those movements all a part of a ten thousand dollar plum? Were things jelling?

Lisa, startlingly beautiful in a white cocktail dress that left her shoulders and neck bare, approached with a man of athletic build and handsome features. The man's dark eyes glistened. His name was Banty Winters. He owned a rest camp somewhere in northern Wisconsin.

"Banty wanted to meet you, Arthur," Lisa purred. "He has never met a true war hero."

Winters' palm was smooth but hard in handshake. Derrick had the impression he had gripped a marble slab.

Then Winters asked, "You happen to be looking for a job, Derrick? I've got an opening at my camp. I always like to help our service veterans." He clipped words, his manner of speech revealing an inner tension.

"I'm not looking, Mr. Winters."

"Well, if you ever are, come on up."

Lisa's smile conveyed amusement as she said, "Arthur, at the moment, is tied up, Banty."

"Yeah?"

"With Harry. They are being very secretive about it, the two of them, but—"

"Lisa?"

Another man joined them. He was short and square, looked sixty, was dressed expensively, had salt streaks in carefully groomed hair, a tough manner, and the coldest eyes Derrick had ever seen. He and Banty Winters exchanged curt greetings, then Lisa performed the introduction: "Ben Fouraday, Arthur Derrick."

Fouraday did not offer to shake hands. He bobbed his head and said, "Lisa, I have to talk to you."

It was an order, but she ignored it. "Take Banty and find drinks, Ben. I'll join you in a few minutes." She waited until the two men were out of earshot before she purred, "I see you are not running, Arthur." She laughed softly. Her fingers found his arm; he felt the nails bite. "Is it me," she asked, "or is it Harry who is keeping you?"

She raised up on her toes and Derrick knew an instant of panic. He thought she was going to kiss

him. His eyes swept the room.

Then she stepped back. "Later," she challenged in a low voice. "Okay?"

She did not wait for a reply, but left him. Derrick took out a handkerchief and wiped his brow. His eyes found Roberts and he jerked reflexively. Roberts was staring at him hard from across the large room. Derrick shifted his weight uncomfortably as Roberts approached.

"Derrick, all of a sudden, I think you had the right idea this afternoon. I think the time has come for you to head south."

"Look, Captain, I—"

"Now! I thought I could trust you, but I suddenly see that I cannot! Lisa belongs to me! Only me!"

"But what about our deal?"

"There is no deal, Marine! Cut!"

Derrick discovered the theft as he was packing the suitcase in the guest room. He whirled on Roberts. "Where is my dough? I had almost five hundred dollars in my suitcase!"

"You did?"

"I'll go to the police!"

"Go to the police. I couldn't care less. Get out, Derrick."

Angry and chagrined, Derrick wanted to strike out, pummel Roberts, but he knew he would only lose. Roberts had permanence

in Chicago, influential friends, while he had nothing. He had the feeling he had been taken, bamboozled, suckered, that there never had been a plum of any kind in the offing. Yet he was puzzled, too. If all Roberts had wanted was his meager savings, why hadn't the captain taken him along the highway to Chicago? He could have at any motel stop.

Derrick left the building. He was confused and filled with a desire for revenge. He wished he had never returned to a Vietnam valley to rescue a dozen prisoners. He wished he had left a captain out there to die. He put his suitcase on the sidewalk, looked inside his wallet. He counted eight one dollar bills. It was all the money he had. He glanced at his watch. It was 11:20 on a hot night.

"Arthur?"

His name floated down to him. He craned his neck, looked up at the building. Her dress was a vague white on a balcony above the lights. He saw the object plummeting toward him and he stepped back. It clanged against the sidewalk and bounced. Other pedestrians made quick, wide circles around it. Derrick stared. It was a metal bookend with an envelope taped to it. Derrick opened the envelope and took out a note and a one hundred dollar bill. The

note said: "Go to Banty's place." Derrick fingered the bill. He had a hunch it had come from his cache.

He left Chicago the next morning, went up into the Wisconsin northland and found the resort camp, but he had to wait two days before Banty Winters showed. Winters seemed surprised to find him waiting and professed not to know anything about Lisa Roberts' conniving. He asked, "Do you want to go to work?"

Derrick debated. He could return to Chicago and accost Lisa, he could head south, or he could work. He had fifty-two dollars left in his wallet, which would not take a man too far south.

An old geezer named Carter taught him the ropes at the lake boathouse, and during the next two weeks Derrick discovered the Marine doctor had been wrong about his arm. It didn't give him trouble; it seemed adequately repaired. He almost was ready to head south when suddenly Lisa Roberts appeared at the camp, with Benjamin Fouraday. They registered as man and wife and set up in one of the cabins.

Derrick asked Winters, "What the hell is going on?"

Winters' face became stone. "Don't worry 'bout something that's not your concern, Derrick.

Take care of the customers and the boats, huh? I'm a resort owner, not a marriage counselor."

Lisa came down to the boat-house late that afternoon, barefooted, wearing fresh white shorts and a fresh white blouse. She sat on the edge of the dock to dangle her feet in the lake. The sun triggered brilliance all through her hair and Derrick felt a warmth rise in him as he stared at her.

Suddenly he said bluntly, "I want the rest of my money!"

Lisa looked amused. "Are you accusing me of stealing?"

"Snatching almost five hundred bucks from a guy's suitcase—what do you call it?"

She was silent for a moment. Then she admitted, "Stealing, I guess."

"Well?"

"In time, Arthur. In time I'll return all of your money. First I have to know a couple of things. The most important is, why did Harry bring you to Chicago? Was it to kill me?"

He knew his mouth was open, but no words came out. He gulped.

She nodded somberly. "I see that it was."

"You're crazy, doll!"

"Arthur, I'm not afraid of you. At first, I was. That day you showed up at the front door with

Harry, I was scared stiff. If you had made the slightest move toward me that day, I would have run screaming into the streets. But you didn't, and as each hour passed, I regained confidence."

"Doll—"

She waved him down. "That afternoon in the bathroom, the afternoon I kissed you, I was prepared to kill *you*. I had put a knife under the pillow on the bed. But all you did was dump me. I knew then, Arthur, that I no longer had to fear you. Is it me, Arthur? My physical attributes? Am I *that* desirable to you? I *have* to know."

He said nothing.

"I know Harry, Arthur," she went on. "Harry will not murder, but he would hire someone to murder for him. On the other hand, he would have to trust that person totally. That's why I played up to you. I had to shatter that trust in you. Are you a killer, Arthur? Do you kill for money? Can you kill without feeling?"

He continued to remain silent against the enormity of her words.

She looked straight at him. "I took your money in an effort to keep you available. If you're the kind of man I think you are, I need you. Are you that kind, Arthur?"

He stared out across the lake

water. Something out there—the emptiness—held him. He felt as if none of this were real, as if he would awaken soon and all of this would be a fantastic dream.

"Arthur? How much money did Harry offer you?"

"He talked about ten thousand dollars," he said reflexively.

"A pittance."

"But he didn't say anything about killing you or anyone else. Your husband didn't tell me what he—"

"Harry isn't my husband, Arthur." She got to her bare feet. She stood close to him. Her smile was tight. "He was my lover. When Harry was on leave, we lived as man and wife, yes, but—"

"Where is he now?"

"In Chicago. In a hospital. Ben put him there. Ben and I are going away together. We had to have a few days start so Ben arranged an accident for Harry. But Ben has to get on his feet, too. That's why we came here. Ben is drunk today. He will be drunk tomorrow. That's how it is with him. When things pile up, get to be too much for him, he has to hole up and drink. Usually the drinking lasts about two days. It's how he finds release from his tensions."

She paused, used a red fingernail to trace a haphazard pattern on Derrick's chest. Then she said

softly, without looking up at him. "The only trouble is, Arthur, I don't want to go away with Benjamin Fouraday now. I want to go away with you. That's why I introduced you to Banty, took your money, and sent you here. I wanted you here when . . ."

Her words trickled off as he turned from her. He felt drunk with confusion. He wiped perspiration from his brow and entered the boathouse. He sank to a tarpaulin and stared at the open doorway. He expected Lisa to appear. She did not. He sat for a long time, breathing harshly, and then got up and looked out at the dock. Lisa was gone. He wagged his head. He had never known so much confusion in his life. All of this talk about killing and running away and . . .

He went to Banty Winters, who only shook his head. "Don't you like your job, Derrick? Or is it the pay?"

"Neither," he said. "I have to bug out, that's all."

"There's a bonus at the close of the season."

"I know. You've said."

"It'll get you south for the winter."

"Yeah, but—"

"Lisa?"

Derrick jerked and Banty Winters grunted. "I know what's go-

ing on inside you, boy. I've been the route, too." Winters lit a cigarette. His face became a mask. "Any man who has ever been around Lisa longer than five minutes feels as if he has been hit with a club. But you'll get over her, boy. A couple of more days and she'll be gone. She and Ben will return to Chicago. Ride those days out. I need you. This is the middle of my season." He paused, looked Derrick straight in the eyes. "Anyway, you'll like yourself better over the long haul if you don't run. If you do run from her, she'll be with you the rest of your life. She'll always be there, back there inside your skull someplace. The dame who showed you she was better than you. The tramp who . . ." He cut off the words, shook his head. "You get the picture, don't you, boy?"

Against good judgment, Derrick relented. He walked out of Banty Winters' office. He liked Winters, and liked working at the camp. He was putting away a few dollars. In another month the season would be finished, and he would have enough money to travel to Acapulco comfortably. The hell with a girl who talked about murder and running away. She was as phony as a Dixie dollar!

A brisk wind, born on the lake, sent whitecaps bouncing against

the dock that night and Derrick went down through the row of boats checking the tie lines. When he returned to the boathouse he found Lisa sitting on a small stool inside the workshop. She laughed softly when he stopped short.

"Come on in," she said. "I won't bite. Promise."

She was wearing hip skimmers, a sweater and a lightweight wind jacket, and she sat on the stool with the heels of her loafers caught on a rung, her knees high and closed. She put her elbows on those knees and inventoried him critically. "You went to Banty this afternoon," she said. It was a flat accusation.

"Get out, doll."

"What did you tell him? About Harry in the hospital? About—"

"I wanted my wages."

"And he didn't give them to you?" She looked mildly surprised, but Derrick suddenly felt he did not have to explain.

Abruptly she left the stool, went to the open door, looked out, closed the door and put her back against it. She was somber but tense. The muscles along her jawline danced. Her eyes were narrow now, bright behind the slitted lids. "I'm going to take a chance on you, Arthur Derrick," she said evenly. "I have a proposition for you. How fond are you

of money? Lots of money, thousands of dollars. I know where there is that kind of money, Arthur. All stacked neatly together and just waiting for you and me to gather it."

"Doll, do me and yourself a favor. Beat it."

"The least you can do is look!"

She stepped away from the door, took the knob. "Come on, bring a flashlight. The money is in Ben's car! He's totally drunk and sound asleep. It's a perfect opportunity!" She opened the door. "Come on! Aren't you even interested enough to look?"

The idea of an automobile being a bank vault was absurd. Yet the girl waiting for him was so intent, he knew she was not lying.

Derrick got the flashlight and they walked silently up to the cabin she was sharing with Benjamin Fouraday. The sleek convertible was at the rear. She produced a key from a jacket pocket and opened the trunk. He played the flash inside on emptiness. Then Lisa bent in front of him, worked with the edges of the floor, finally raised it. The light from the flash became paralyzed on the neat packages of money.

She allowed him to gape for about five seconds before she hissed. "All right, douse the light!"

She replaced the floor, closed

the trunk lid and turned him back to the boat house. They entered his quarters where he got out a fifth of bourbon and took a long drink from the bottle. Lisa lit a cigarette.

"Well?" she said. Her look was speculative. "Interested in heading west, Arthur—with me and the money?"

"There must be a million bucks in that trunk," he breathed.

"No. About \$750,000. Ben stole it. From whom is not important. The important thing is, do we head west together?"

He drank again from the bottle.

"Ben will come to his senses sometime tomorrow. He will need tomorrow night to sleep off the final dregs, then he will be ready to travel. We're supposed to drive to San Francisco, but I don't want to go with him. I want to go with you. That's why I talked him into coming here after we left Chicago. For one thing, he needed to relax. He's been a long time stealing the money, almost two years. He built quite a tension inside himself doing it, and had to unload before he exploded. But, more important, I knew you were here. I need you, Arthur. You're my kind, my age. You and I can go places together. I knew it the moment you walked in the front door of my apartment with

Harry." She moved closer to him.

"Lisa, I'm not a thief."

"It's the same money Harry wanted you to kill for!"

"Nor a killer."

"Then why did he bring you to Chicago?"

"I don't know."

"He offered you ten thousand dollars! He told you—"

"He *mentioned* ten thousand dollars."

"He was going to give you the ten thousand to kill me! To kill Ben! Harry knows about the money! *How* he knows I don't know! But he *does* know and—"

"Lower your voice. Someone could be walking around outside."

She continued as if he had not interrupted, except that she almost hissed as she went on. "You've seen the money, Arthur! All you have to do is kill Ben and—"

"I've said, Lisa, I am not a thief or a killer." He felt numb and lightheaded. All of this was still a bad dream.

"All right! I'll pay you! You don't have to go with me! I'll give you twice what Harry offered! I'll give you twenty thousand! Just kill Ben for me! I can't have him coming after me! And he will! He'll spend the rest of his life looking for me! You *have* to kill him for me, Arthur!"

"Get out, Lisa."

"I can't do this alone! I can't kill him! You have to do that part! You have to—"

"Get out!" he roared.

Silence suddenly hung between them, heavy, pressing. Neither moved for a long time. Then Lisa turned, ran water in the sink, doused her cigarette under the stream, left the dead butt on the counter and walked to the front door. She took the knob, looked back at Derrick. "Think about it, Arthur," she said in a surprisingly calm voice. "Think about all that money, and you and me, and San Francisco. But don't be forever. Ben will tire of drinking tomorrow, and killing him will be simpler while he still is drunk."

Then she was gone and Derrick was left standing in the kitchenette thumping clenched hands against the counter edge while her last words screamed across his mind again and again: "*Think about it, Arthur.*"

He did not sleep that night. He dozed. He paced. He drank from the bottle. He felt as if he had a fever. He attempted to think of many things to keep his mind busy, but it was clogged with a memory: the light of a flash playing on stacks and stacks of money secreted in the trunk of a sleek convertible. There was a girl, too, a warm, vibrant, beautiful girl

who wanted to head west, go to San Francisco, set up housekeeping.

Kill? Yes, he had killed—but that had been in war. It never had been murder; nor was it ever going to be.

The day dawned pink and calm. The calm brought out the fishermen early, kept them out. Derrick was busy all morning. The pace finally slackened at noon, but the lull was bad. It gave him more time to think, and he didn't like his thoughts. He became afraid of them, especially when he caught himself imagining what it would be like to wheel Ben Fouraday's convertible bank through western mountains with Lisa beside him.

He didn't see her all day and he found her absence disturbing. He had figured she would appear on the dock early in the morning to start pressing him. In the afternoon he caught himself repeatedly studying the beach area, separating one tanned body from another. He didn't find Lisa. Then about five o'clock a new thought struck him and his heart lurched. He walked swiftly up through the row of cabins toward the office building until he spotted the nose of the convertible behind Ben Fouraday's cabin, and his heart-beat slowed. For a few minutes he had wondered if Lisa somehow

had found the courage to carry out her plan alone.

The cabin looked dead. The two front windows glistened in the late afternoon sun. The front door was closed tight. What was happening behind that door? What had happened? Where was Lisa?

He went into the office, dropped coins into a machine, took the package of cigarettes. Walking back to the boathouse, he inventoried the cabin again. Nothing moved over there, no one appeared.

Eager fishermen, anxious to try the quiet evening water, kept him busy then. It became dark. The fishermen remained on the lake. Once he dashed up into the rows of cabins and sneaked another look. There was light behind the shaded windows of the Fouraday cabin but he did not see moving shadows. The convertible had not been moved. Maybe Ben Fouraday was going on an extended drunk this time.

The final fisherman came in about ten forty-five that night. Derrick still had a long thirty minutes ahead of him to clean the boat. He worked hard to quell the temptation to run up to the Fouraday cabin again, see if there still were lights, see the convertible.

Then abruptly his name came out of the dark beyond the boat-

house, flat and hard: "Derrick!"

He jerked and almost spilled out of the boat.

"Derrick, you fink!"

Ben Fouraday lurched out of the darkness and stood spread-legged in the light that poured from the open door of the boathouse, bobbing heavily. He looked as if he had just left a brawl. Baggy pants hung loose on him. He was barefooted. A wrinkled shirt was open down the front and the tails hung outside his pants. His chest, matted with black hair, and a protruding stomach heaved with his breathing. His hair was in wild disarray. If he had gone down to his knees Derrick would not have been surprised, but Fouraday managed to stay upright and bawl Derrick's name again.

Derrick left the boat and said crisply, "Yes, sir."

Lisa came out of the darkness behind Fouraday and Derrick gaped surprise. Her painted mouth was smeared as if she had been kissed savagely. Her blouse was torn, revealing scratch marks on her skin.

"That's him!" she hissed. "It was Arthur Derrick who tried to . . . tried to . . . Oh, Ben, he threw me down on the ground and he was . . . awful! He was . . ."

The words faded out as Four-

day lunged. He looped his right arm from far back and brought it down in an overhand swing. Derrick stepped to his right and jabbed a short blow into the bare stomach. It brought a deep grunt from Fouraday and doubled him. Then Fouraday backhanded Derrick who hadn't expected that kind of reaction. The blow caught his cheek, sent him reeling down the dock. Fouraday lunged crazily. Derrick sidestepped, banged his hands against a meaty shoulder. Fouraday spilled off balance with a yell. Then he was gone from the dock and Derrick heard him hit the water between two boats.

Lisa cried out, "He can't swim!"

Derrick plunged into the water after the floundering Fouraday without thinking. He got behind Fouraday and caught his head, holding it up so the man could breathe. The water was only chest deep. If Fouraday would stand there was no danger, but he was liquor-saturated and didn't have his senses. He flailed the water, fighting it. His feet would not remain under him.

"Drown him! There's nobody around!" Lisa rasped.

Derrick's hands found Fouraday's shoulders. He felt the submerged man struggle, but Fouraday did not seem desperate. Rather, it was as if he might be floating

through an intricate series of dance steps. Then after a long while he was quiet, and Derrick realized he had been holding Fouraday down while he stared up at the intent girl bent over him.

"Is he dead?" she whispered.

"Yes."

"It was an accident," she said. "He slipped and fell into the water. You attempted to save him.



But you were simply unsuccessful."

"No good," Derrick said. "Bring me rope. There's a coil of rope in the boathouse."

She hesitated until he snarled, "The rope!"

He tied Ben Fouraday's body to a supporting post under the dock, then went into the boathouse and found the extra boat anchors. He went back into the water and pushed Fouraday down into a sitting position. He tied an anchor to each arm, then used more rope to tie him in a sitting position against the post. The fish would have a hey-day, of course, but Ben Fouraday might never be found.

Derrick heaved himself up onto the dock. It was empty. He bolted. Sloshing water at every stride, he raced up into the cabin area. The convertible's engine was running when he skidded around a corner of the cabin. Lisa was at the steering wheel. He yanked open her door and slammed her across the seat.

"Arthur!" she cried, as if she had been injured.

"Running out, baby?"

"Run . . . Oh, Arthur, no! I just was warming up the motor, just . . ." She buried her face in her palms.

They were miles down the highway when she asked quietly, "Arthur, why couldn't we have

let Ben be a drowning accident? It would have been simpler."

Derrick was sure it would have been—for her. During the days of the official investigation, she easily could have disappeared with the money. He only shrugged.

"Where are we going?" Lisa asked.

"Do you care?"

"No, not really . . . I guess." She slid across the seat, sat against him, put a palm on his thigh. "I just want to be with you."

"And the money." He felt her flinch.

"Well . . . naturally," she said softly.

"Where did it come from, doll?"

She hesitated. "The Syndicate, the Chicago operation. Ben Fouraday was a bookkeeper and teller for them. He made bank deposits for them for years."

"And banked a little for himself on the side, huh?" Derrick said with much more aplomb than he felt. The idea of stealing from gangsters made his nerve ends jump. Ben Fouraday must have been a man of fortitude.

"You and Fouraday," he said. "Explain."

"I met Ben while Harry was in Vietnam. He fell in love with me and asked me to go away with him. He used the money . . . well, sort of as a lure."

"The sucker. Dead and broke."

"Arthur, that money can take us to the end of the world!"

"If we live long enough. Doll, I don't think those people in Chicago are going to be happy when they discover Ben Fouraday was stealing from them. They're going to look for him—and for you, Fouraday's girlfriend, who no longer is a resident of the city."

"But we've got a running start, Arthur, and I can change my appearance. I can change my hair style, buy a wig, even—"

"Eventually they're going to find out about me, too. They're going to talk to everyone ever associated with Fouraday—Harry, Banty Winters."

"You can have your appearance changed, too. We can go to San Francisco, Los Angeles—it doesn't matter—and you can have plastic surgery!"

"Is that how you and Fouraday planned it?"

"We were going to San Francisco! Yes! I told you!"

They were in the Colorado mountains. It was late afternoon. Neither had slept since they had left Banty Winters' summer camp in the Wisconsin lake country, and now Derrick was bone-tired. His muscles ached, his eyes itched. He had to make his move. He had to sleep soon. Yet he couldn't kill

again. He had murdered once, and the enormity of that act was still on him. He could not kill again in cold blood.

They climbed into a mountain pass. There was a rest area at the side of the road. Derrick braked. There were no other cars in the area, none whishing past on the highway. It seemed an ideal spot. He left the convertible, taking the ignition key with him.

Lisa joined him, looked puzzled. "Why have we stopped?"

"Doesn't it feel good to stretch your legs?"

"Oh. Well, yes. Yes, it does."

They walked to the rim of the rest area. Below, there was a shallow gully filled with rocks and trees and discarded beer and pop cans.

"You know, baby, something has been bugging me."

She frowned.

"Harry has been in Vietnam the past couple of years."

Her frown deepened.

"So how could he have known about Ben Fouraday and some stolen money—unless someone wrote to him about both?"

Lisa paled.

"I said Fouraday was a sucker," Derrick went on carefully, "but now I wonder if that could have been the kettle calling the pot black. I suddenly have the sus-

picion I've been suckered all the way through this deal, too. I have a hunch the stealing of my money from my suitcase, the jealousy bit by Harry, the throwing me out of the apartment, the sending me to Banty's place was all part of a scheme to have Ben Fouraday killed by me outside of Chicago. I have a hunch—"

Her movements were swift. She snapped open the purse. Her free hand dipped inside. Derrick caught her wrist, spun her and clamped her back against his body. Her hand was out of the purse. There was a tiny gun gripped in her fingers. He held her arm extended so that if the gun fired it would be a wild shot off into the gully.

"Is Harry waiting for us in San Fran, baby?" he rasped in her ear. "Were you supposed to cut out at our first motel stop?"

She lashed back at him with her leg. Her spiked heel dug into his shin, made him dance. He carried her with him, managed to snap the gun from her fingers.

"Harry can kill in war, but you said he doesn't have the stomach for murder. Is that it?"

She kicked again. He cuffed her ear, made her bend in pain. "So you were to get me to murder for you, then ditch me!" he wheezed. "Well, sorry, doll!"

He waltzed her to the rim of the gully and sent her spinning off balance. She screamed. He snatched up the gun and raced to the convertible. Five miles down the highway, he pitched the gun over the rim of the road. He was moving fast now, his fatigue forgotten. He didn't bother to look at the money in the false bottom of the trunk until he was a few miles outside of Las Vegas. He pulled off the highway, took a package of bills for pocket money, then drove on into Vegas where he abandoned the car.

Taking a cab to the airport, he caught a flight to El Paso.

Derrick then crossed the border, purchased a junk car, drove to Acapulco and rented a shack along the coast, but it was two weeks before he finally stopped flinching at the sound of someone approaching behind him, stopped sweating at the sight of a stranger. A measure of confidence returned. The Syndicate wouldn't find him here. He even managed to begin sleeping without dreaming about a body tied to a dock post under the surface of a Wisconsin lake. He had money any time there was a need, but there were few needs. He wore tattered shorts. He lived alone and on nothing. His body became as browned as the natives.

"Derrick?"

He flinched and rolled from his sunbathing position across the sand, the grains sticking to his wet torso. He wanted a gun, any weapon, but he had nothing, only his hands—and a weaponless Harry Roberts and Lisa stood too far away for hands to be of use.

Roberts was smiling, but it was not a good smile. It was too tight, too set. "We've been looking for a long time, Derrick," he said, "for a man who had a passion to be an Acapulco beach bum, but there is a lot of beach here. It has taken a while to find you. However, now all we want is the money. You keep ten thousand—minus what you've spent, of course."

Derrick laughed. It was a harsh sound. He looked straight at Lisa. "How long did it take you to walk to California, doll?"

She snarled and stepped toward him. Roberts reached out and caught her arm, jerked her back. It got Derrick the instant he needed. He shot from his knees toward Roberts, then rushed and drove his shoulder into Roberts' middle. The two men went down hard and rolled. Derrick suddenly was at a disadvantage. Roberts was astride him. The blade of a flick knife glinted in the sunshine. Derrick grasped Roberts' wrist, but the blade was moving, and penetrated his chest.

Derrick heaved and thrashed with the pain. The sand was gritty and seemed to penetrate his back. A hot sun beat down on him. He was on an Acapulco beach. He had always wanted to live here. He had never wanted to die here—but he did.



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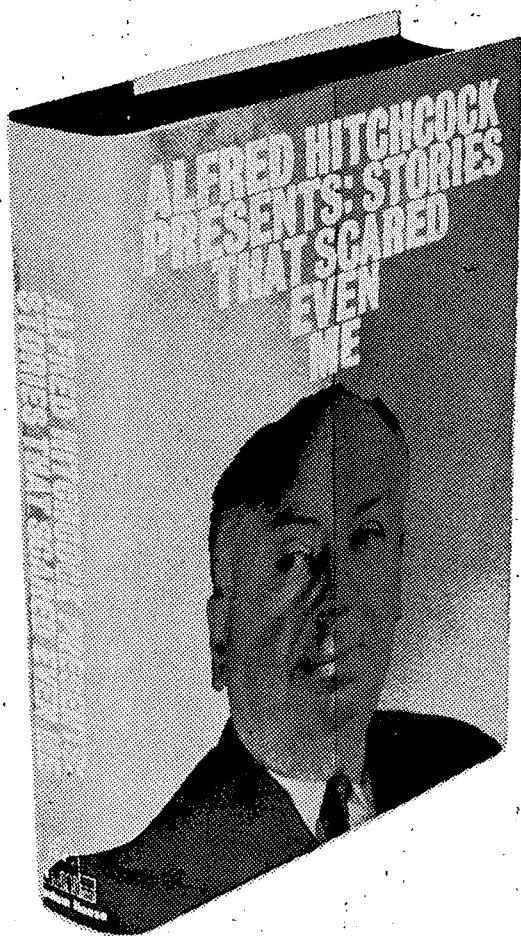
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